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MYSTERIOUS WAYE

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MYSTERIOUS WAYE

THE STORY OF "THE UNSETTING SUN"

BY

PERCIVAL CHRISTOPHER WREN

"Let the counsel of thine own heart stand, for there is no man that is truer unto thee than it."

WITHDRAWN

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

First Edition . . . 1930

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TO

MRS. J. L. DUNN,

WITH LOVE FROM US BOTH;

IN MEMORY OF VOYAGES WHEREON

HER PRESENCE GUARANTEED

SUNSHINE

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NOTE

TRUTH is so very much stranger than fiction that one runs grave risks to one's reputation if, in writing a work of fiction, one permits oneself to tell the truth; or even if one professes to do so.

Thus, and therefor, the author would fain state that only the more improbable, the more incredible and, indeed, the most impossible, events narrated in this book are true, in spite of the fact that all the rest are also founded on fact.

That is to say, the people depicted in this story are drawn from life, and the things stated to have happened to them did happen to them, though not, of course, at the exact time and place, and in the coherent sequence, described in the book.

For example, the most absurdly incredible episode of all, that of the escape from prison of a man who, single-handed, captured and controlled and, for a night, ruled that prison, tells of an actual and real event that happened at the Oklahoma Penitentiary at Little Rock, on

December 8th in the year 1920, when and where a convict, one Thomas Slaughter, No. 17556, did precisely as narrated in this book.

Indeed, as Oscar Wilde has observed, "Fiction dare not be as strange as truth."

But, after all, what does it matter, provided the story be interesting?

PROLOGUE

THE PRE-HISTORIC AND ANCIENT PROLOGUE TO A MODERN STORY

MUK, the son of Nur, found the Unbreakable Stone when searching for flints suitable to his purpose as a maker of weapons—arrows, spears, axes and flint-knives. Pleased with its size, shape, appearance and curious feel, he dropped it in his thong-sewn pouch of goat-skin.

Seated that evening at the mouth of his cave and at the receipt of custom as tribal armourer, Muk endeavoured to break the curious stone, and, though soon on his mettle as a professional breaker and shaper of stones, he found it to be utterly unbreakable. Realising this, he neatly wedged and bound it, with sinews, at the end of a cleft handle, and quickly rose to fame and fortune as a flint-knapper of marvellous skill.

A modest man, for his time and station, he freely gave the credit for his outstanding success, to the wonderful tool that he used. And this was his undoing, for one, Ug, armourer to a neighbouring clan, and one of the world's first communists, was seized with the idea that he had as much right, as Muk, to the unbreakable hammer-head.

True, Muk had found it, had realised its potentialities, had made the tool, and used it for the public benefit and welfare as well as for his own.

Well, Ug the Communist would now go and "find" it, and use it. . . .

First of all he found Muk, sitting beside the flat stone that constituted his shop-counter, and working away at a pile of flints which he was splitting and chipping into various tools and weapons, according to their size and shape.

"Greetings, Muk the Knapper," quoth Ug.

"Greetings, Ug son of Neb."

"They say that your hammer-head is unbreakable, Muk Knapper. It must be harder than flint," observed Ug Nebson.

"Harder than any stone there is," agreed Muk.

"Harder than your head?" enquired Ug.

"Actually," agreed Muk.

"Let me look at this stone," asked Ug, holding out his hand for the magic hammer.

Pleased and proud, Muk let his fellow-craftsman examine the hammer.

"Harder than your head, eh?" wondered Ug, and suddenly smote with all his strength.

"Why, so it is," he added, smiling humorously as he perceived that the Unbreakable Stone was still unbroken, while the head of Muk was undoubtedly broken beyond repair.

But Mug, the son of Ug, imbibing his parent's

communistic tenets, did not see why the Old Man should make all the money—in other words, warm furs, pliant and useful skins, haunches of venison, fish, birds, and other articles which were at once standards of value and media of exchange.

So Mug, the son of Ug, one day crept softly up to where his father lay sleeping off the effects of one of those debauches which he, as a wealthy ex-communist capitalist, could well afford, and, gently withdrawing from beneath him the famous hammer, used it upon Ug precisely as Ug had used it upon Muk.

But Mug, albeit that, at this early hour of the dawn of History, no derisory connotation was implicit in his name, was defrauded of his treasure, with the utmost ease and ignominy.

Mel the Fair, the daughter of Ob, did but smile upon Mug, twinkle, and playfully throw a bone at him as he passed beneath her casement or hole in the cliff-side in which her family lived. Conceivably it was the jaw-bone of an ass, but Mug, retrieving it, pressed it to his bosom and threading it upon a thong wore it thereafter about his neck, a love-token and a highly fragrant memory.

Realising that his sudden passion bade fair to be as permanent as it was consuming, Mug laid his heart and hand and fortune at the feet of Mel the Fair.

"You must first prove both your love and

your skill," said the shy maiden, " for until the end of the wedding-feast you must hang the Unbreakable Stone about my neck as a sign and a token. Then, when we are united and I come to dwell in your cave, the Unbreakable Stone may again become a hammer and our source of livelihood. Can you do this, Mug ? "

" Pooh! Nothing easier," quoth Mug, exalted, and, in one day, he converted the Unbreakable Stone from a tool into a jewel, set in a tiny net of sinew bound to a flat thong of hide, that his beloved might wear it upon her forehead or about her shapely neck.

Thus wearing it, Mel departed that night with her other lover, one Nun, a mighty hunter who graciously accepted the Unbreakable Stone and, hearing the story of its acquisition, roared with deep-chested laughter. Gathering Mel the Fair into his arms, he thought of the stone's late owner, and murmured as he kissed her,

" That silly Mug ! "

But the Unbreakable Stone proved Mel's undoing, for the High Priest of the tribe of Kush, to which her lover belonged, explained the outbreak of a virulent epidemic as a manifestation of the anger of the gods—due entirely to the fact that the Unbreakable Stone, a patently and extremely sacred stone, was not only in the possession of an unanointed layman,

but was constantly put to secular base uses.

At the High Priest's bidding, Nun and Mel were put promptly to a violent and painful death, and the Unbreakable Stone, henceforth to be known as the Holy Stone, became the sacred charge, if not the property, of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners of the tribe. It became *tabu* in fact, and in the secret hiding-places of the treasure-vaults of dim temples was for a time hidden from the eye of man.

Anon, the anger of the gods, or else undernourishment, insanitary conditions of living, or a malarious situation, brought disease and death upon a neighbouring tribe. Promptly it occurred to the tribal priests that, inasmuch as an epidemic was stayed in the valley of Kush by the arrival and presence of a sacred stone—the famous Holy Stone of Kush—the obvious thing to do was to beg, borrow, buy or steal the stone and instal it in their temple for the pleasure and propitiation of the angry gods.

And since the men of Kush would in no wise be persuaded to give, lend or sell the Holy Stone, nothing remained but to take it. So the priests of the stricken valley sent word saying that, as necessity knows no law and their necessity was great, the nine points of the law of possession would be set aside and Might would take the place of Right.

War promptly followed, hundreds were slain, thousands were mutilated and, in the varying fortunes of war, both valleys were in turn swept with fire and sword, pestilence and famine.

In the end, a powerful chieftain, seeing the weakness of the mutually destructive tribes, fell upon them both, made a Solitude, called it Peace, and departed with the Stone of Contention—the famous Holy Stone, concerning which, nations went to battle.

§ 2

From whom "The Unsetting Sun" received its name we do not know, nor in what epoch of the world's history. From time to time it disappeared for long periods from the ken of man, secreted in some King's or Emperor's treasure-house or tomb; and from time to time its unparalleled and ineffable brilliance shed a lurid and a baleful light upon some great war, great murder, great treachery, great invasion or great slaughter, for which that brilliance was responsible—or rather for which human nature and man's covetousness and greed and lust to own the marvellous source of this brilliance were responsible.

What we do know of the history of The Unsetting Sun is that it flamed in ancient China, in old Siam, in India, in Persia, in mediæval Russia, in Austria, and finally in America—and that once again, suddenly and

mysteriously, it disappeared from human sight and knowledge.

But, in addition to the meagre collection of historical facts concerning The Unsetting Sun, there is of course a vast store of legend—legend which, as always, has a basis and substratum of fact and truth.

Folk-tales there were of the fame of this vast diamond in Babylon, of its being the chief glory of the treasure-house of Cyrus the Great King; and of Atossa his daughter and Darius her husband; and of Xerxes their son; and of Cyrus the Younger; and of its finding its way, after the battle of Cunaxa, to Greece, in the goat-skin pouch of a soldier; of its being sold for a song and taken to Egypt; of Cleopatra binding it about the brows of drunken Anthony; of its dazzling Zenobia's Palmyra; of its going to the Cham of Tartary; of its possession by Saladin; of its opening and delighting the eyes of Ser Marco Polo; of its being won from the Great Shah by the Grand Turk—and of a hundred other scenes and settings.

But true or false, actual or imagined, every incident and every story in History and in Legend concerning this, one of the largest and purest and loveliest diamonds that the world has ever seen, is an incident and a story of evil and of bloodshed, of crime and sin and shame and sorrow. And undeniably it was always known

as an " unlucky " stone ; though few paused to consider whether the stone itself was an unlucky thing—or whether the greed and wickedness of Man rendered its possession an unlucky state.

§ 3

By far the most persistent and, by no means the least interesting, of the legends that clustered thick about The Unsetting Sun, was that telling of the curse of the High Priest of one of the Pharaohs.

This curse was laid upon the stone, after the commission of a crime of the most revolting treachery on the part of Pharaoh's wife and her lover, the Captain of the Royal Bodyguard. These two, trusted and beloved, murdered the Pharaoh to gain possession of the jewel, with which they fled from Egypt.

The High Priest's curse, publicly made, repeated far and wide, and carried by merchants from Alexandria to the ends of the earth, declared that the stone, and all who owned it, should for ever accursed be.

Nothing should ever lift the super-human curse, save the doing of a super-human deed —that of a man such as this world knew not, one who, owning the stone, his rightful and honourable property, should freely, voluntarily, and of his own high virtue, destroy it—and, with it, the curse.

BOOK I

PART I

THE BAFFLING AND MYSTERIOUS MURDER OF MR. WEBB OF WITHERBY END

CHAPTER I

IT was the unfulfilled ambition of Mr. Theophilus Webb of Witherby End to be called "the Squire," and to be mistaken for a very well-known sporting Peer whom, in some respects, he slightly resembled—especially at a distance. The greater the distance, the greater was the resemblance, possibly on account of the fact that distance lent enchantment to the view of Mr. Theophilus Webb.

Mr. Webb would have had greater chance of being known as "the Squire" had he not been handicapped, partly by a slight but incurable accent or intonation of voice unknown to any county, district or town of England; partly by the fact that he was an absolute newcomer to the county; and partly by the fact that, at the time of his arrival at Witherby End, he did not, and could not, ride a horse, knew nothing whatsoever about fat stock or sheep, and less than nothing about agriculture, farming and country-life in general.

Nevertheless, Mr. Theophilus Webb certainly looked the part, particularly when one of the best English tailors had dressed him for it.

Huge, burly, rubicund, clean-shaven, blue-eyed, he might have sat, with his open ingenuous countenance, grizzled curly hair, humorous mouth, rosy gills and neat side-whiskers, for a portrait of John Bull himself.

Dressed in rat-catcher riding-kit, with low hard hat and big-buttoned covert coat ; wearing always in his button-hole the white flower of his blameless gardener ; he looked, as he stood in his vast stable-yard, smacking his box-cloth leggings with his hunting-crop, the typical British country-gentleman—almost.

Until he opened his mouth. . . .

And Mr. Theophilus Webb, wealthy and well-known race-horse owner, was an admired, respected, and popular man among all who got to know him.

And there again, one has to admit a qualification, and confess that, somehow, very few people did know him. But then, getting into English County Society is notoriously a slow and difficult process—more particularly so in the case of a person, however wealthy and generally admirable, who appears suddenly from nowhere, seems to have no background, and possesses no local sponsor.

What no one could deny, was that Mr. Webb was beloved of his tenants, business associates, tradespeople, employees and " inferiors " generally ; and was the type of man of whom the station-

master, ticket-collector, guard and porter ; the taxi-driver, waiter, chamber-maid and all hotel servants ; golf-caddies, beaters, jockeys, grooms, stable-boys, gardeners, footmen and butlers, speak with respect, regard, and admiration verging upon reverence and affection.

Not that Mr. Theophilus Webb of Witherby End kept a butler and footmen himself, for, as he explained, he did not like men-servants in the house, though he gave no reason for this prejudice.

It was evident, however, that he did not object to servants *qua* servants, for, as certain of his visitors and guests were wont to remark, he had a discriminating taste in hand-maidens —his housekeeper being remarkably handsome, his parlour-maid notably pretty, his cook a buxom pleasure to the eye, his housemaids exceptionally attractive, and even his kitchen-maid a right comely wench.

§ 2

Mr. Theophilus Webb, at ease with dignity, sat, one cool June evening, before the pleasant log-fire which at once warmed and lighted the great library of Witherby End—that fine old English room, furnished throughout, at one fell swoop, regardless of cost though regardful of period, by London's leading firm of purveyors of good taste and old-looking furniture—a noble

library in which Mr. Webb did almost everything but read.

Certainly he slept there a good deal, for it was his nightly custom to empty the decanter of fine old port that he had begun at table with his dessert, and to refresh himself, after the labour of so doing, from another decanter and a syphon of soda-water.

Mr. Webb found that a bottle of port, followed by the better part of a bottle of whisky, made him sleep almost as well as anything—though he freely admitted that what he drank with dinner, before the port, probably helped. This sound and pleasantly-induced sleep invariably began in the deep arm-chair before the library fire, and frequently continued quite far into the night.

On this occasion, the night of his last sleep in that or any other arm-chair, Mr. Webb awoke suddenly and uncomfortably, to find a man, tall, grey-eyed, clean-shaven, dark-faced and grey-haired, a stranger—no, not a stranger—standing on the hearthrug before him; one hand in the side pocket of his jacket, and the other resting negligently upon his hip; and regarding him with pursed lips that slowly extended into a most unpleasant and sardonic smile as Mr. Webb, with paling face and whitening lips, whispered a name.

Nodding his head slowly and gently, and

smiling ever more unpleasantly his thin-lipped bitter smile,

"Well, Spider," said the visitor softly, and, with a cruel purring savagery in his quiet voice and restrained manner, added,

"An unexpected pleasure . . . for you . . . eh, Spider Schlitz?

"No, don't move, you damned dog," he continued, as Mr. Theophilus Webb drew in his feet and placed his hands upon the arms of his chair, preparatory to rising to his feet.

"Don't move . . . yet," and the hand that rested in the coat-pocket moved slightly in the direction of Mr. Webb, without being withdrawn from its place of concealment.

Mr. Webb obeyed implicitly, for he doubted not that the pocket contained more than a hand.

"Just lean back . . . all nice and comfortable . . . while we have a little talk, Spider Schlitz. That's better, *Squire* . . . And fold your hands over your fat stomach, where I can see them."

Mr. Theophilus Webb moistened dry lips.

"How did you get in here?" he said in a voice noticeably less robust than usual.

"Walked," was the terse reply.

"Seem to know your way about the place!"

"Perfectly. If some of your harem had got as much brains as looks, I shouldn't be here."

Mr. Webb pulled himself together, and glanced thirstily at the decanter.

" Look here," he said, " I'm only half awake. What's the game? What was wrong with coming in at the front door, in daylight? Why didn't you write, or ring me up? And what have you come for, anyway? To bring me my share of the St. Clair stuff? "

" You cut that right out," growled the visitor. " Don't you try any funny stuff with me! D'you think a thing like you could pull wool over my eyes? What have I *come* for? I've come to get what's mine—and to give you what's coming to you . . . Now then, you dirty double-crossing son of a skunk, cough up, quick. Where's the sparkler? "

Mr. Webb laughed, with little humour and much sarcasm.

" You ask *me*! . . . *You* ask *me*! . . . Why, you goddam fool or liar—didn't Simon collect from Uncle and make his get-away with it? " and in his righteous indignation and rising excitement, Mr. Webb's right hand slipped from his left hand, and slid down to his side.

" Yes," sneered the visitor. " And who killed Simon, eh? *You* did. . . . Who but you would have killed him? Who but you and I knew that Uncle was minding the diamond, and that Simon collected it, eh? "

" Sure! As you say, only you and I—and you have the gall to come here and pretend that Simon is dead and that . . ." Mr. Webb's

right hand had disappeared towards his hip-pocket, and his visitor struck quickly, ere pinning Mr. Webb by the throat with one hand, and seizing his right wrist with the other.

Mr. Webb was fat, thick-necked, soft from good living, of full habit, and inclined to the apoplectic. The heavy blow, the hand of steel at his throat, the knee violently driven into the pit of his stomach, and the weight of his powerful adversary, defeated him ; and it was after the briefest of struggles that the pistol which he had drawn from his hip-pocket was wrenched from his grasp.

" Noisy things, guns," observed his assailant, rising and standing over Mr. Webb who lay collapsed in his chair.

" . . . Or you'd be dead by now, Spider Schlitz," he added. " Now then, come across with the shiner. I don't leave here without it, and believe me, Spider, you don't stop here *with* it—alive."

" Now look at here, man. Get wise to this," expostulated Mr. Webb, as soon as he could speak. " I haven't got the diamond. You've got the bulge on me, and if I had it, I'd ante up, and no call for you to hand out the rough stuff. You're barking up the wrong tree, I tell you. . . . Why should you pretend Simon's dead and that I . . ."

" Stand up," interrupted the other, and his

quiet voice was menacing, deadly. "Pull out your keys. Where's your safe?"

"Right here in this room," replied Mr. Webb. "And see here, I'll open it for you. My secret cache. And show you that I . . ."

"You're going to . . . Go to it, quick," interrupted the other man.

Crossing the room, his own pistol almost touching the small of his back, Mr. Webb went to where a beautiful oak staircase led up to a gallery that, some ten feet from the floor, ran round the book-lined room.

Ascending a couple of stairs, Mr. Webb seized in both hands the large highly-polished wooden ball that crowned the newel-post of the solid oak balustrade. Leaning back with all his weight and strength, he pulled the ball towards him, as though to break it off. There was a click, and one of the numerous small wall-panels slid aside. Into the aperture thus revealed, Mr. Webb thrust a somewhat trembling hand.

"You ring a bell or try any funny stuff, and you'll get yours," warned the visitor, "and if the noise brings anybody, we'll shoot it out."

"Can't you take my word for it that I'm not double-crossing you any more than you are me—if you aren't double-crossing me, that is," replied Mr. Webb, as, with another click, a heavy oak door, some four feet by three, swung open, exposing the front of a safe, which, to the experienced

eye of the interested observer, was obviously of the latest and most ingenious pattern.

After a few seconds of busy silence, Mr. Webb swung open the heavy front and, with three different keys, unlocked three other doors of compartments which themselves were safes within a safe.

"There you are," he said. "That's where I keep my stuff, and you're welcome to any diamonds you find there."

"Pull everything out," was the curt reply, "and empty those bags."

"Well?" observed Mr. Webb a few minutes later. "Satisfied?"

"Sure," was the cold reply "—that it isn't there. Now look at here. I didn't ask you to show me where it *isn't*. . . . Which is your Bank? Where's your safe-deposit place? . . . Get busy, and save me the trouble of looking through all that stuff for a bank-receipt."

"I haven't got a safe-deposit. I haven't got a box at any Bank. I haven't even got a deposit account. I use the Witherby branch of the London and Northern for current . . . Can't you take it from me that Simon's alive and has got it right now, and that I've never seen the diamond since we . . ."

"Is that your last word? . . . You won't come across?"

"My bible oath . . . I . . ."

"Your last word?"

"If it *was* my last word. I swear to God I . . ."

"Turn round."

As Mr. Webb obeyed, the other man, reversing the pistol in his right hand, suddenly struck him with all his might, below and behind the ear.

"You dog . . . You damned, lying, swindling, double-crossing cur," he growled, and in a sudden access of passion, flung himself upon his victim as he rolled over upon his back, and, dropping the pistol, seized the thick throat in the steel grip of his powerful hands.

"Double-cross me, would you? . . . *Me*, you poor fish! . . . Swindle *me* . . . Can you hear? . . . *Can you hear?* . . . Can you? . . . You lying, thieving skunk . . . ."

And with each growl and curse and question, the fingers sank yet deeper into the throat of Mr. Webb, whose face was rapidly changing from crimson to purple and from purple to black.

Minutes later, satisfied that his victim was dead, the murderer, his own face suffused with rage, partly lifted the body from the ground, and, with vindictive savage violence, dashed it down again, and, still clutching ferociously the dead man's neck, repeatedly beat his head upon the ground.

At length, wearied by his own violence, the slayer rose to his feet.

"Swindle *me*, would you?" he growled again, "and me lying there for years, in prison, eating my heart out in that stone cell, and you lolling in luxury with your cars and your carriages and your wines and your harem . . ." and in another overwhelming access of rage, he kicked the dead man with all his strength.

"And now you've got yours, Spider Schlitz," he said, as he turned from the corpse to the contents of the safe—papers, account-books, small bags and boxes, which lay in a little heap upon the carpet.

If the swine had not parted with The Unsetting Sun, when he got it from Simon—doubtless killing the vanished Simon to get it—and had not concealed it in the house, he would probably have deposited it at some Bank. In that case, the receipt would be among these papers. And if he had sold it, either whole, or after having had it cut up, there should be a mint of money somewhere or other.

Hard luck if it were in some easily traceable or unconvertible form. . . . Not very likely, though, with a man like Spider Schlitz, who might find himself on the run at any minute. No, a man who might have had to get-up-and-get, at an hour's notice, wouldn't have much to do with bonds, stocks and shares, and stuff that would need selling-out by a broker. He'd

have his wad, or most of it, convertible and accessible, portable and untraceable. Great value in small bulk—cash, pearls, diamonds . . . there would almost certainly be a good haul of those. . . . Yes, what about the St. Clair hundred? They alone stood for a million dollars, anyhow.

As he thought, he searched savagely with dexterous hands guided by an experienced intelligent brain, glancing swiftly at documents, tearing open large sealed envelopes, unfastening packets tied with tape, opening chamois-leather bags, morocco-leather boxes, all intriguing but obviously too small to have contained the great diamond.

No, The Unsetting Sun was not kept in the safe, and apparently . . .

Suddenly, swift as a panther, the man turned about and sprang to his feet, for a sound had broken the perfect silence of the room.

With a swift intake of his breath, he stared across the body of the murdered man at the door of the library . . . The door . . . The door . . . For beyond possibility of doubt, not only was it half open, but the handle was turning—and slowly, carefully, and silently, the door was being closed . . .

The door was shut from without . . . and silently, slowly, gently, the handle was turned back again into its place.

BOOK I

PART II

MYSTERIOUS WAYE APPEARS

CHAPTER I

MELLOW afternoon sunlight flooded the beautiful yet austere room in which Dr. Charters held consultation with his patients. Everything in it, save only the professional instruments upon the desk, gave the impression of an antiquity wholly beneficent, an antiquity which gave grace and glory with nothing of decrepitude or decay.

Old carved oak from the Monastery from which the house had been partly converted and partly built; old Persian rugs and carpets; old brass, weapons, pictures, armour and books, all contributed their share to an almost perfect whole.

The black oak panelling and ceiling, which had re-echoed a thousand times the laughter of more-or-less reverend abbot and prior, monk and friar and knight of the shire, failed, at any rate upon this glorious June day, to render the room dark or in any sense gloomy.

True, the corner occupied by Dr. Charters' huge desk was a place unlit; and there, entrenched, the Doctor could sit in shadow, and

consider the face of any occupant of the great and deep arm-chair which stood where the light from the window fell full upon it.

About the empty room a bumble-bee buzzed and boomed heavily, his drowsy hum serving but to accentuate the heavy silence and drowsiness which seemed, as with a mantle, to enfold the beautiful old house and garden.

Anon the bee departed by way of the great open window, leaving the lovely room to its waiting silence, its expectant stillness . . .

As the hitherto noiseless clock struck two, the door opened and Dr. Charters, followed by his secretary, a pale young woman carrying papers, entered the room.

Seating himself in his own corner, the Doctor, without speaking, swiftly read and signed the letters placed before him, and then, with the words:

"Miss Lauderdell in five minutes," dismissed the secretary.

Dr. Charters, drawing from his pocket a bunch of keys attached to a gold chain, unlocked a drawer, produced a book, unlocked the book and, leaning back in his chair, studied the last entry that he had made in it.

Dr. Charters, proprietor, manager, and chief physician of this, his luxurious and famous Nursing Home, was, like so many eminent and

fashionable physicians, quite unlike the popular conception of an eminent and fashionable physician.

A tall, well-built and well-dressed man, he was unexpectedly and unfashionably hairy, wearing as he did moustache, whiskers and beard, in addition to luxuriant locks that, brushed straight back from his noble forehead, curled up to avoid contact with his collar.

As to his visible features, it may be said that the Doctor's face was both handsome and inscrutable. None might know, from his expression, what he was thinking; whether he were pleased or displeased, happy or sad, angry or calm, surprised or not surprised—a "poker" face, in short, its inscrutability greatly assisted by its hairiness.

Nor were the Doctor's hands in any way of the type usually associated with surgeons and physicians, for they were hairy, coarse and heavy, the fingers short and blunt, and, save for scrupulous cleanliness and manicure, were rather those of a manual labourer.

A bell pinged softly once.

The Doctor touched a button beside his desk; the door, or to be exact, two doors—the outer heavy, baize-covered, the inner ancient, of solid oak—opened, and a beautiful girl, accompanied by the secretary, entered the consulting-room.

"Miss Lauderdell," said the secretary, and departed, closing the heavy doors silently behind her. As she did so it could be seen that a quietly-dressed man sat on a heavy oak seat, once a monkish stall, beside the outer door which opened into a stone-flagged hall.

"Well, Marjorie, my dear," said the Doctor kindly; and, without rising, indicated the strategically-placed arm-chair which faced his desk.

"Good afternoon, Dr. Charters," said the girl, and, seating herself, fixed upon him the steadfast regard of her clear large eyes.

The Doctor studied the young face framed in short curling fair hair, noting again the healthy pallor of its complexion, the firm well-cut lips and determined moulding of the shapely chin, the look of grave intelligence and sweetness that had no look either of precocious sophistication or of childish insipidity.

"And how are you feeling to-day?"

"A little better, I think, thank you, Dr. Charters," the girl answered.

"Come, that's splendid . . . Splendid . . . Evidently the medicine is agreeing with you."

"Yes, Dr. Charters, and I feel more than ever convinced that the other was not. As I told you, I felt worse every time I took it."

"How are you sleeping?"

"Very much better again. Since . . ."

" Since we changed the medicine, eh ? Was that what you were going to say ? "

" Yes, Dr. Charters. And since . . ."

" Since you and Dr. MacAdoo . . . ? "

" Yes," agreed the girl. " Since I was so very rude as to refuse to . . ."

" To have anything more to do with Dr. MacAdoo and his treatment, eh ? " said Dr. Charters.

" He *wasn't* doing me any good, Doctor. I got worse and worse. I was certain . . . I felt it in my bones that he wasn't doing me any good . . . On the contrary, I . . ."

" Well, well, you're in my hands now, my dear ; and, without for one moment agreeing with what you say and what you ' felt in your bones,' I fully admit that no patients are going to get the maximum of good from their treatment unless they have absolute confidence in their doctor."

" That's what I think," observed the girl.

" Well, we're going to be all right now, eh ? And you'll do whatever I tell you, and take whatever I give you, with implicit obedience and absolute faith, eh ? "

" Yes, Doctor," replied the girl after an almost imperceptible pause, during which the Doctor's probing eyes searched her face, his own expressionless, inscrutable.

" I *can't* understand it, Dr. Charters. I was

never ill in my life. Not for a minute . . . Never once . . . Not for a second . . . Until I had to go and live with my uncle and aunt. It began then . . . And so suddenly . . ."

"But you know all about it," the girl added, her voice trailing away sadly.

"Do you suggest that your uncle's house is unhealthy?" enquired the Doctor.

"It proved so for me. Yes."

"I mean, do you think it is unhealthily situated? Or the drains wrong? . . . Anybody else ever ill there? . . . Servants or anybody?"

"No, Doctor. Only I."

"It couldn't have been the house or the place then. No . . . And of course you're no better here—yet."

"No, Doctor, I'm not. A great deal worse, if anything. At times, anyhow. And I am quite sure that Dr. MacAdoo's treatment . . ."

"There, there, my dear, come now! . . . I can't listen to your views on Dr. MacAdoo. And besides, although it's over-full already, I'm putting you on to my list," and the movement of Dr. Charters' moustache seemed to indicate that he smiled, although there was no smile in the grey eyes that probed and probed relentlessly.

Before that dominant hypnotic stare, the girl's eyes fell. But though her face flushed

and her speech faltered, she again raised her eyes to the Doctor's face and, with real courage, said,

"Dr. Charters, I want one of two things—either to go away, or to have Dr. Studley. Preferably to go away. I'm not getting better, and I'm not happy here . . . And I *hate* that man at the door."

Dr. Charters leaned back in his chair, and inhaled through his nose a short, sharp breath, the sound of which was as that of a contemptuous sniff.

"Your going or remaining is a matter for your uncle to decide. Your changing from Dr. MacAdoo to Dr. Studley is a matter for me to decide. And you'll certainly not do it. I can take you from Dr. MacAdoo's list on to my own, without hurting his feelings, by saying that your case particularly interests me—as indeed it does. But I cannot have a chopping and changing of doctors at the whim of the patients . . . Have them wanting to prescribe for themselves next! . . . As for your not being happy here, it is, of course, a symptom. Sick people never are happy. What you have got to do is to get well . . . And you'll best do that by implicit obedience and by helping instead of hindering us."

Frowning, the girl stared at her feet, tugging at her handkerchief as she did so, the expression

of her face troubled, anxious and perturbed. She appeared wholly unassured and unconvinced.

"However," continued the Doctor, "I'll tell your uncle what you say."

"When is he coming, Dr. Charters?"

"This afternoon. Appointment for two-fifteen. He's probably here now. That was why I sent for you. I regret I can't give him a better report."

"I should like to see him, please, Dr. Charters."

"I'll bring them along to your room at two-thirty."

"Is my aunt coming as well?"

"I really don't know, my dear. Do you want to see her if she's here?"

"No."

"Very well . . . Now let me see . . ." and the Doctor consulted a chart or time-table that hung framed, but unglazed, between his desk and the wall.

"I'll see you again on Thursday at . . . three o'clock; and we'll see how you are by then . . . Unless your uncle should take you away, of course."

Dr. Charters touched a bell-button and, a few seconds later, a tall powerful woman, dressed as a nurse, in snowy coif and blue uniform, entered the room.

The girl glanced at the nurse, with her too rose-pink complexion, too perfect eyebrows and too coral lips, and quickly looked away again, as her young face hardened and her mouth set mutinously.

"Miss Lauderdell will go to her room now, Nurse Jones. Her guardian will come and see her in a few minutes, and then I think perhaps she'd better go to bed."

"Yes, Doctor. Come along dear," and, smiling a shade effusively, the nurse wafted the girl away with a rustle of starched drapery, a whirl of floating coif, and a flash of brilliant teeth.

The Doctor touched another bell-push and the secretary appeared.

"When does Sister Weldon return? Tomorrow, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes, Sir. She comes on duty in the morning."

"Mr. and Mrs. Lauderdell here?"

"Yes, Sir."

"I'll see them in three minutes, exactly. . . . Mr. James still there?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Send him in as you go out."

Mr. James entered, carefully closing both doors.

As he did so, the face of Dr. Charters ceased to be inscrutable. It beamed. Mr. James was

evidently something more than *persona grata* to Dr. Charters, for the cold grey eyes lit up and the whole face genuinely smiled.

Not so that of Mr. James. Indeed, his mask-like countenance, suggestive rather of marble than of flesh, but rarely warmed to life, rarely glowed with kindly feeling—a face that looked as though it would crack, break, shatter in pieces before it would crease, bend or curve into a kindly and friendly smile.

This was he of whom Marjorie Lauderdell had bluntly expressed her hatred.

"Stand by for boozy old Lauderdell, Jimmy," said the Doctor. "Take him for a walk in the grounds. Say—ten minutes from the time he comes out from here."

With an imperceptible nod, Mr. James retired, reappearing a minute or two later to announce Mr. and Mrs. Lauderdell, whom the secretary had conducted to the consulting-room door.

Mr. Lauderdell, a weak, feeble-minded simple-looking, pleasant-spoken country gentleman, stupid, beery and handsome, greeted Dr. Charters with a respect akin to reverence.

This was the less gratifying and complimentary to the Doctor in that Mr. Lauderdell respected most people and revered many.

Like a considerable proportion of the people who can do a number of things quite well, he

was very much aware that there are many who can do them a great deal better. A moderately good shot, he respected all good shots and reverenced His Majesty the King for his wonderful shooting. A fairly straight rider to hounds, he respected all horsemen and reverenced jockeys, cavalry-officers and M.F.H's. Reasonably good at games, he respected all serious players of games, and reverenced all who excelled. Deeply respecting all women, he reverenced his wife.

Mrs. Lauderdell had never been heard to state that the sentiment was not reciprocated, and, if lacking in reverence for her weak and whiskified lord, was not outwardly wanting in respect, while ruling him with a rod of iron.

" Well, Doctor, and how's my little Marjorie going on ? " boomed and beamed Mr. Lauderdell as he grasped and warmly shook the Doctor's hand, the moment it relinquished that of Mrs. Lauderdell. " Put her right, eh ? Put her right ? "

" Well, well. Hardly that yet, my dear Sir. Hardly that yet . . . You must give us time, you know . . . Rome wasn't built in a day —and Marjorie won't be re-built in a day—or a week . . .

" Or a month, I'm afraid," he added.

Mr. Lauderdell's cherubic and rubicund foolish face clouded.

"Dear, dear!" he said. "A month? Poor little girl. How she'll hate . . . er—ahem."

Dr. Charters was merciful.

"Naturally," he agreed. "How she'll hate being here for another month, you were going to say. Quite so. She's getting very impatient—not to say discontented—and wants to go away already. Oh yes, she'll hate it, all-right."

"Well, of course . . . I mean to say . . . Must have sounded very rude of me . . . Most lovely place . . . the perfect nursing-home and all that, if one has to be in a nursing-home . . . but, er—cooped up y'know . . . active girl—golf, tennis, riding and all that . . . miss it badly . . ."

Mr. Lauderdell fell silent.

"What the devil *is* the matter with her?" he asked suddenly, screwing his monocle into his eye and transfixing the Doctor with a sudden stare from the apparently distended orb.

"We-e-ll, that's a very difficult question to answer, my dear Sir. There may be deep-seated and obscure nervous lesion . . . mental trouble as well as physical . . . obscure . . . difficult to explain. . . . And I'm quite sure you won't be offended if I say that, even so, it would be very much easier for me to explain it than for you to understand it, and . . ."

"*Quite* so—er—*quite* so, my dear Doctor," interrupted Mr. Lauderdell explosively, rever-

ently dropping his eye-glass, as unworthy to gaze longer upon the Doctor's countenance in curiosity and inquisitiveness. "Merest ignorant layman . . . I fully understand."

"I *fully* understand," he added, in fullest confession of his lack of understanding. "*Fully*. Er—nothing serious, I trust? Just a little—er—tummy-trouble? . . ."

"Well . . . rather more than *that* . . . I'll have a quiet talk with your wife in a minute," hedged the Doctor, and incontinently Mr. Lauderdell sprang to his feet.

"Of course! Of course! Yes, yes, quite so, quite so . . . Poor dear little Marjorie . . . God bless my soul," and drawing a large coloured silk handkerchief from his pocket, Mr. Lauderdell licked dry thirsty lips with a dry tongue, and violently blew his nose, as he turned to depart.

"Er—could I see her?" he asked, as the Doctor touched a bell.

"Why, certainly. I'll take you up myself in a few minutes."

At the door, Mr. Lauderdell was possessively received by Mr. James, and gently but irresistibly shepherded to the beautiful and spacious grounds which, with spreading sunny lawns and timbered shade, surrounded the Monastery on all sides.

As the door closed behind her husband, Mrs. Lauderdell withdrew her hitherto idly wandering

eyes from the window, and concentrated their level gaze upon the Doctor's face.

At first sight, Mrs. Lauderdell appeared an ordinary, rather attractive, pretty and well-dressed gentlewoman.

There are those, of course, who are prejudiced against a small and thin-lipped mouth whose smile never varies ; against somewhat close-set eyes of which the iris is too yellow to be really green, too green to be really yellow ; against tiny flat ears almost entirely devoid of convolution ; against a certain angle of nostril-curve and certain lines running therefrom.

For an appreciable number of seconds, the gaze of Dr. Charters met that of Mrs. Lauderdell, as the blade of one fencer holds that of another, in silence and stillness, as each watches and waits.

The silence was broken by the woman.

" I'm sorry to hear poor darling Marjorie isn't so well," she said.

" Did I say that she isn't so well ? " asked the Doctor.

" Well—I gathered from what you told my husband that she isn't very happy, and wants to go home."

" She isn't very happy and she wants to go . . . er . . . I don't think she, or I, said ' home.' "

" Is she getting better, Doctor ? "

"I wouldn't go so far as definitely to say that."

"But she's going to get better, Doctor?"

There was a clear note of anxiety in Mrs. Lauderdell's voice as she asked the question, and the expression of her face was beseeching.

"A difficult question. How can I say off-hand? It depends . . . It depends on so much."

"On very much, Doctor?"

Dr. Charters slowly nodded his well-brushed anointed head, reminding Mrs. Lauderdell of a sagacious elephant; and the movement of the hair upon his face suggested that he pursed his lips in profound consideration.

Again silence fell upon the beautiful room, while the lady eyed the Doctor and the Doctor eyed the lady, whose face was ceasing to look quite ordinary.

Without speaking, she opened her hand-bag, and from it took a tiny gold memorandum-case. Removing its attached pencil, she scribbled on one of its little leaves, tore it off at the line of perforation, and handed it to the Doctor.

Dr. Charters, humouring his visitor, glanced at the paper, smiled and dropped it, a crumpled pellet, into the waste-paper basket beside his desk.

"A thousand thanks," he said.

"Ten thousand," smiled Mrs. Lauderdell,

and it was as though the fencers, ending their friendly bout, lowered their foils and removed their masks.

They then conversed further, awhile, and more freely.

"She's a dear girl," the lady said at last with a sigh, as she returned the little gold book to her hand-bag.

"Ah, there's my husband," she added. "We'll go and see her for a minute, and then we must be going."

"Yes, she's a dear girl," agreed Dr. Charters, rising. "We're all very fond of her indeed. When is her birthday, by the way? We must have a little celebration."

"Oh, how nice of you, Doctor. The first of September. An easy date for you to remember. *Twenty-one, on the first of September.*"

"September the first," nodded the Doctor, and added, "Partridge-shooting begins."

"Yes," smiled Mrs. Lauderdell, "partridge-shooting begins," and preceded the Doctor from the room, as her husband, accompanied by Mr. James, approached.

Up a flight of deep-worn stone stairs, along a flagged gallery and echoing stone corridors, the Doctor led his visitors, the while Mr. James again seated himself in the ancient abbot's-chair by the consulting-room door.

At an iron-studded oak door, the party halted,

and, after rapping with the ancient " door-nail " knocker, led the way into the large and glorified monkish cell which was Marjorie Lauderdell's room.

" Hullo, Uncle," said Marjorie, going to Mr. Lauderdell and returning his kiss as he put an arm about her shoulders. " I'm so *glad* you've come. It does seem an age since you were here . . .

" Good-afternoon, Aunt Maud," she added, without offering her hand.

" How are you, darling child ? " replied Mrs. Lauderdell, taking the girl's face between her hands and kissing her on the lips.

" Yes, how's my Marjie ? " repeated her uncle, thumping her kindly and repeatedly upon the back.

The girl glanced from the departing Nurse Jones to the face of Dr. Charters.

" Well enough to come away, Uncle," she replied, seizing that gentleman by the lapel of his coat. " I want to come away from here."

" Oh how *splendid*," cried Mrs. Lauderdell with obvious relief. " Then you *must* be better, Marjorie. I knew Dr. Charters would soon put you right. But we mustn't be hasty . . . We mustn't . . ."

" No, no, Marjikins," agreed Mr. Lauderdell, pinching her cheek. " We mustn't be hasty . . . Mustn't want to run away directly you

are beginning to get well. Always make a good job of anything, Marjie. Don't want to have to come back again directly you get home."

"I shan't have to come back, Uncle. I never used to be ill. I'll be perfectly all-right when I . . . I want to come away."

"Oh come, Marjie, my pet, be reasonable. You know how I'd love to take you back with me now. I'll bet you I'm looking forward to your coming home as much as you are."

"Oh Uncle Will, I feel . . ."

"What does Dr. Charters say?" interrupted Mrs. Lauderdell.

"I say have a little patience and a little common sense . . . a little self-control," replied the Doctor bluntly. "Do you suppose there is anybody in this establishment who does not want to go home?"

"No," answered the girl quickly, "I can't imagine anybody being here and not wanting to get away."

Uncle Will looked a little shocked, a little hurt.

"Oh come, Marjorie," he said, "after all that Dr. Charters is doing for you. Sounds a little ungrateful, what? I . . ."

"She means that anybody would naturally rather be well and strong and out in the world again, enjoying life . . . One can quite under-

stand their wanting to get away," explained Mrs. Lauderdell.

"So you will soon, darling," she added. "Have a little patience and do what Dr.Charters tells you."

But Marjorie remained obdurate, rebellious, and drove even her weak, kindly, and vacillating uncle to a feeling of uncomfortable annoyance, almost bordering upon anger.

There was, perhaps, just the slightest cloud shadowing and cooling the light and warmth of their usual friendly regard, as Mr. Lauderdell and his niece parted, but—

"*Do* come again soon, Uncle," said Marjorie as, almost, tearfully, she kissed her relative good-bye, and less affectionately bade his wife farewell. "Do come and take me away from here."

Dr. Charters, shaking his head a little anxiously, himself saw the Lauderdells to the hall, and Mr. James ushered them to their car.

Entering his consulting-room, the Doctor, after carefully closing both doors, resumed his seat behind his desk and proceeded to make entries upon the case-card of Miss Marjorie Lauderdell, observations which showed that he was not nearly as satisfied with her health and general condition—physical and mental—as Mr. Lauderdell supposed.

Having completed, to his entire satisfaction, his account of Miss Lauderdell's progress—alas, a swift down-hill progress accompanied by marked mental deterioration—Dr. Charters carefully re-read it, his hand supporting his head and shading his face . . . And then, suddenly raising his eyes in profound thought and deep abstraction from his surroundings, realised that they were gazing into those of another man, who was standing silent, between himself and the big open window nearest to his desk.

In utter amazement the Doctor stared, distrusting the evidence of his senses.

The man—who must have stepped over the low window-sill into the room, from the lawn, was dark, tall, lean, broad-shouldered, grey-haired, strong. On his clean-shaven, grey-eyed face was a look of menace and of hatred ; on his thin wry lips a cruel smile, sardonic, minatory . . .

Lounging forward, his hands in the pockets of his coat, the intruder, seating himself sideways on the edge of the desk, with nonchalance and aplomb, leaned forward and, still smiling crookedly, enquired

"Well? . . . And how are things going with Half-hung Simon?"

CHAPTER II

THE Doctor's eyes narrowed, otherwise not a muscle of his face moved, nor did his expression change by a hair's breadth.

Half-hung Simon ! . . .

His mind leapt back over the gulf of years, and he saw himself seated astride a rangy bay horse, his hands bound behind his back, one end of a rope noosed about his neck, the other tied to a branch of the big tree beneath which he waited for death . . . and the Missen crowd waited to see him die. He could see their faces now, and old Buck Witton, the girl's father, fingering the trigger of his Winchester while the boys bade Buck not be a soft-gutted fool and a spoil-sport. He could hear Chuck Masters' voice :

" You don' wanna shoot the skunk, Buck."

" Sure thing you don't . . . Not till he's danglin'," Shorty Coghlan had shouted, and grabbed Buck's gun.

Finally, as the sun set, after what seemed hours of dreadful torture, they had all cleared off, dragging Buck Witton with them.

How often had he wakened, trembling and sweating, from dreams of sitting, bound, upon a restless horse ; entreating, cajoling, caressing with his voice, praying alternately to his horse and to his God ; and of the awful agony, mental and physical, when, stretching its neck downward that it might graze, it had taken one step forward, and then another, until the rope was taut . . . was choking him . . . was forcing him to lean back at an agonising angle, and twist, edge, wriggle his body towards the horse's crupper . . .

How often in his dreams had he fallen with a terrific crash, a crash of the breaking bough that had saved his life.

The Devil had been watching over his own when Chuck Masters had flung the rope over that unsuspectedly rotten bough. And again when he sent Mick Ryan, the Oakville Camp saloon-keeper—to whom he owed money—riding by, and within sight of where he lay.

Half-hung Simon ! . . .

Dr. Charters' eyes narrowed yet further as he stared at the face of the man who sat coolly swinging a leg and leering triumphantly.

Had he been one of the Missen outfit ?

He could not place him.

Slim Spike Simmons ? No. He'd gone to "the chair" years ago.

In a fraction of a second, as by the light of a

flash of lightning, Dr. Charters saw his past, its darkest corners illuminated. In none of them could he find this man, though most certainly he had seen his face or portrait before.

From the days of his youth, as a medical student in London, to those of his fame as the successful and fashionable physician of Harley Street and The Monastery Nursing-Home he reviewed his life.

Childhood . . .

His feebly-nagging shrewish mother; his drunken and disreputable father, a genius *manqué*, of great intellect and little virtue; now rich, now poor; now up, now down; now living in a fine house, now flitting from mean street to meaner.

He could hear him now:—

"Ah, my boy, there's only two ways of making real money—quick and easy money. One's a patent medicine, and the other's a patent religion. Look at Pumper's Purple Pills for Pimply People—bread-crumbs and calomel. A farthing's worth for half-a-crown. Look at the Prophet Stone and his Latter-Day Church of Holy-Rolling Pebbles of Jordan's Shores. Why, Old Man Stone must have made a million out of the prayer-books and hymn-books alone. Not to mention subscriptions, donations, and the Excellent Law that every

member must leave his property to the Church . . ."

Anyhow, Father had made a doctor of him —perhaps with an eye on the Patent Medicine scheme, should his own Patent Religion scheme fall through.

College . . .

He had distinguished himself too, and had worked like a slave—after that bad fright when the cold shadows of the prison-house had almost fallen across his young path. Fool that he had been, to try and use the scalpel at that age, and that degree of inexperience. But the money had tempted him—and he had got away with it.

Practice . . .

Excellent and growing . . . until the old itch for quick and easy money had got the better of his prudence and he had again encountered Maud . . . nurse . . . fashionable masseuse . . . beauty specialist . . . confidante of a flock of "Society" black sheep, outcasts, parasites—and his evil genius. (Fancy Maud hooking poor old Lauderdell—she'd be Lady Lauderdell when his father died!) What a practice they had got together, and what a cruel thing that he'd had to leave it all and skip to America to escape blackmail and ruin.

Not that Maud had had anything to do with that. She had been square enough; but if he

had never met her, might not he have run straight . . . ?

Not he . . . Not his father's son.

America . . .

Gee! That Religion stunt had been good hunting. He had made a killing there all-right. Those old women—of both sexes—sitting up on the hill all night waiting for Judgment Day to dawn, while their Pastor sat on the eleven-fifteen Overland Limited to Chicago, a smile on his face and the dollars in his suit-cases ! . . A very good haul, that . . . His father had been right. A much more paying game than the sort of shady medical practice that had again sent him fleeing—to Missen and red ruin.

That had been another bonanza too, when he'd raised the big subscription-fund to finance the expedition to Mount Ararat to locate and excavate the Ark of Noah . . . That expedition hadn't started yet, in spite of the splendid financial response of the faithful ! . . .

And that book-selling game had been a gold-mine while it lasted. The advertisement and the tens of thousands of letters : " Your money refunded if anyone can disprove a word of this book. Scandals in royal families . . . Revelations. . . . A book that should be read by all adults of both sexes. Admittedly true in every detail. It is the plain duty of each self-respecting American man and woman to get it and

think it over. Sent to you in plain wrapper, marked ' private, personal, and confidential.' Has had a great sale in Europe and is discussed by kings, presidents, statesmen, bishops, clergy and leaders of the people. Send five dollars at once. . . ."

Thousands had sent their five dollars and each had received a cheap, second-hand copy of the Bible. . . .

Half-hung Simon . . .

Where had this fellow known him ?

Rio ? . . . Buenos Ayres ? . . .

Chicago . . . ?

A hectic patch that. Profitable but rather dangerous.

The gang . . . Spider Schlitz . . . Bohunk Marwitz . . . Slim Spike Simmons . . . Mad Marelli . . . Chink Dorson . . . Louie the Lady . . . 'Frisco Fanny . . . the Bad Wop . . . Spud Hooley . . . Dutch Dettinger . . . A tough crowd . . .

It had been an easy step from physician-in-ordinary and purveyor of knock-out drops, " snow," dope, drugs—and worse . . . it had been a short step from that to active membership and the thinking-up of remunerative stunts.

It had not taken long for him, Spider Schlitz and Chink Dorson, to discover that they were the aristocracy of the gang, the men with the

brains, the guts, and the imagination—real go-getters.

And he had been the best of them and had brought more to the treasury by his speciality —kidnapping for ransom—than any of them ; though Spider Schlitz had certainly run them a good line in blackmail, and Chink Dorson in the girl-traffic, with the help of Louie the Lady and 'Frisco Fanny.

Nice safe business too ; and his English prejudice, leading to his absolute insistence, that not one of them should ever pack a gat, had been their salvation. A stroke of genius. Any fool can pull a gun and plug a cop—and go to "the chair." Much more sense in pulling a wad of dollars—and going scot-free.

And Jimmy had been their sure defence against all rivals, enemies, and squealing victims.

Of course, everybody got sent-up, sooner or later, but the game was worth the candle, even if that particular candle did burn a trifle slowly.

Yes, kidnapping had been a great game while it lasted. The easiest, safest and most remunerative of the lot ; and the gang had had him to thank for all their best hauls, including the biggest of all—the St. Clair diamonds.

Pure bad luck that they had been pinched and sent-up for a few years just when they were doing so well and had brought off the splendid St. Clair *coup*.

However, there's a silver lining to every cloud. There had been a golden, or rather a diamond, lining to this one—for he had got out in time to nobble Spider Schlitz's and Chink Dorson's shares of the St. Clair diamonds, as well as his own, before skipping once more across the Atlantic—England being now safe for him again, and America extremely unhealthy.

Lucky that he had never got into any public trouble in England, or he'd have been struck off the Medical Register. . . . Could this fellow have come from the original blackmailing gang from whom he had fled to America in the first place? No—too long ago. That was all forgotten and the blackmailers gaoled or dead, by now.

Columbia Gaol . . .

A terrible time . . . and a terrible place . . . Ah! Had it been there that he had encountered this swine? Quite possibly. One saw so many hundreds of faces there. He must not give himself away, by asking . . .

Know nothing . . .

Remember nothing . . .

Admit nothing . . .

And that same "nothing" was exactly what this fellow might really know.

And yet the guy knew him as "Half-hung Simon," all-right.

What was the game? Some cheap blackmail

stunt? It might not be so cheap either. No, nor for Mister Blackmailer perchance. "'You have walked into my parlour,' said the spider to the fly" . . . Mister Blackmailer would look silly if, instead of getting away with it, he got bumped off.

Mr. James might have something to say to the fly Mister Blackmailer. It might prove easier to come into Dr. Charters' consulting-room than to get out of it again . . .

Within a couple of seconds of the intruder's question, "Well, and how are things going with Half-hung Simon?", Dr. Charters replied quietly and coolly:

"Is it possible that you are addressing me?"

"Possible, probable, and in fact, quite certain, since there is nobody else in the room," answered the other.

"Then I have no option but to suppose you're mad," observed the Doctor coldly, the hypnotic stare of his piercing eyes searching those of the newcomer, and failing to daunt and cow them.

"Right, Simon. Right first time. Mad as a hatter, Simon. And what fitter place, or person, for a dangerous homicidal lunatic to come to?"

"How and when did you get in here?" asked Dr. Charters.

"Through that invitingly open window, a second ago, Simon."

"How did you get into the grounds?"

pursued the Doctor, still thinking back, wrestling with an elusive memory.

"Over the high wall, Soapy Simon. Over the twelve-foot wall, iron spikes, broken glass and all. By way of the branch of a tree, Slimy Limey Simon—not a *rotten* branch though," and, before the blazing look of concentrated hate that burnt in the man's eyes as he thrust his cruel and distorted face into that of Dr. Charters, the latter almost quailed.

"And so you're mad, are you?" he temporised.

"You've said it, Simon. And you've got to say it again at the right time and in the right place."

"What do you mean? And what do you want?" asked the Doctor perfunctorily, as with concentrated speculative stare he considered the man, the past, and the situation which had arisen.

"Oh, lots of things, Simon. Two for a start —asylum and an alibi."

"Doubtless you're mad, but this is not an asylum."

"Witty Simon! It's going to be an asylum for me though, and the alibi is going to be both physical and mental . . . If I don't get by, on the first, I shall get by on the second."

"I don't know what you're talking about. Do you?"

"Oh yes, Simon . . . *Spider Schlitz has got his.*"

If the expression on Dr. Charters' inscrutable face changed at all, it was in the direction of greater inscrutability.

"And pray who might Spider Schlitz be?" he asked patiently.

"Oh, come off it, Simon. Don't waste time. Cards down and hands up. Spider Schlitz is, or rather was, the dear old pal of Half-hung Simon (*alias* Doc Sellar, *alias* Limey Doc, *alias* English Simon, *alias* The Reverend, *alias* Soapy Sam Symons). Also the dear old pal of Black Jack, Spud Hooley, Jim Crow, Chink Dorson, Slim Spike Simmons, Chicago May, 'Frisco Fanny, Gunman Gryde, Bohunk Marwitz, The Bad Wop, Dutch Dettinger, Shorty Long, Eddie Guerin, Billy the Kid, and the rest of the boys."

"And Spider Schlitz has got his, has he? . . . And you want an alibi and an asylum. *Post hoc et propter hoc?*"

"You've grasped it, Simon. You've got to prove that I've been here somewhat longer than I have; and alternatively you've got to prove that, in any case, I'm much too bughouse, loco, batty in the belfry, looney, dotty, mad . . . far too mad to have known what I was doing, or to be held responsible for my actions. A mental alibi in fact."

"And how should the second arise, if the first one is good?" enquired the Doctor, humouring the self-declared lunatic.

"Why now, Simon, suppose that, in spite of your proofs and protestations, I'd been seen at Spider Schlitz's place—identifications, foot-prints, finger-marks—and I was for it—that's where the looney-dope would get me off . . . Get me sent-up instead of strung-up, anyhow; if not acquitted."

"And where should I be, if I swore you were here and it was proved you were there?" asked the Doctor.

"Why, wouldn't that only be a further proof of the wiliness of the wonky, the cunning of the madman? . . . I must have slipped away from here and done it, and got back again, without being missed . . . *If* I were seen and they track me down and try to prove it on me, that is."

"And why, exactly did you do it?" asked the Doctor.

"Now you're asking questions, Simmy. Inquisitive lad," and the madman, with an ugly leering grin, playfully shook his finger in the doctor's face.

"Did you come straight here from Witherby End?"

"*Ah!* Got you! . . . How does the innocent and guileless Dr. Charters happen to know

that Spider Schlitz's place *is* the Witherby End of the well-known race-horse owner and sportsman, Mr. Theophilus Webb ? . . . *Eh*, Simon ? How do *you* know that ? "

And, with a thoroughly ugly laugh, the madman picked up an ebony ruler and poked the unsmiling Doctor in the ribs.

" *Who* said Mr. Theophilus Webb of Witherby End was Spider Schlitz of the old gang ? " the madman repeated.

Slowly nodding his head, Dr. Charters tacitly admitted that the time had come to change his ground ; and that his visitor had presented sufficient, if not satisfactory, credentials.

Taking that gentleman's advice, he metaphorically put his cards on the table and his hands up.

" And why did you go after Spider Schlitz ? " he asked again.

A twisted cruel smile was the only reply.

" Well, who are you, anyway ? " pursued the Doctor.

" Still inquisitive ! . . . Still asking his little questions, bless him ! I'll tell you who I am, all in good time, Simon. Meantime I'll tell you *what* I am. And I'll tell you what you've got to do —and do carefully. First as to what I am. . .

" I'm the most valuable and invaluable person and patient in your fine and famous nursing-home. I'm the man you've got to

take the utmost care of—the apple of your eye, the most precious jewel in your casket, Simon . . . You've got to keep me very happy, contented, and pleased with you, Simon. You've got to keep me from brooding on the past—*your* past, Soapy! And, above all, you've got to keep me safe . . . Safe from the long arm of the law; for, if they get me, *how* I shall squeak and squawk and squeal, Simmy! And *what* a tale I shall have to tell! . . . Think of the scandal, Sim. The headlines! . . . The consternation in Harley Street, the flutter in the dovecotes.

"Gee! Won't some of the little doves get a fright, when that *dear* Dr. Charters drives off from the Monastery for the last time . . . with two gentlemen in blue! . . . Last drive in that sort of company. Not the first though, eh, Simon? . . .

"So you'll take the greatest care of me, won't you? . . . And if anybody wants to know, *I've been here for a week,* in bed. I'm going to bed now—as soon as I can get there without being seen, eh? And I think I'll get up to-morrow and let everybody see how dotty—though harmless—I am."

"The law doesn't allow me to have any mad person here," replied Dr. Charters tonelessly, and with expressionless face. "Only border-line mental cases."

"No? Well, all that's your trouble, Simmy, not mine . . . You must have me here under observation, then. My relatives have sent me to you, hoping that you'll be able to cure me. I won't be violent, I promise you . . . Not unless your treatment makes me violent, Simon. But I'll be very insane . . . oh, very insane . . . but mind I don't get mad with *you*, Simon."

"And what about the nurses, pray?" asked the Doctor. "How can I possibly pretend that you've been here a week?"

"I leave all that to you, Simon. With the utmost confidence I leave it . . . Do you think I'm such a fool as not to suppose that at least one of your 'nurses' is—er—*reliable*, shall we say? . . . Where's 'Frisco Fanny by the way? . . . Do you know, I fancy there must be one or two nurses and things here, who would be quite sure I'd been here a week if you told them so . . . The Sister-in-charge perhaps, eh? . . . She'd remember my coming in the station fly at, say, ten o'clock, a week ago this morning, and that I wanted to pay the cabman by giving him my socks, and when he wouldn't accept them in full discharge, I asked her to bring me a large sharp axe. *She'll* remember, if you tell her to remember. And if she doesn't, I feel quite sure that one of the others will. You've always had such a way

with the girls—even from the old Missen days, Simon."

"If you've done something against the law, and have left a trail that will bring Scotland Yard here after you, it would be perfectly impossible for me to pretend you've been here a week, even if I wished to do so, and . . ." began Dr. Charters.

"*Your* trouble, Simmy, as I said before. I should worry!" interrupted the madman. . . . "And if they pinch me, in spite of your utmost efforts—unless you can prove that I don't know a thing about what I'm doing, *you're for it* . . .

"Believe me, if I have to do a dance on nothing, Half-hung Simon dances too!" he continued. "He will be Well-and-Truly-Hung Simon, at last. So go to it, Sim, and hope for the best . . ."

"All very interesting . . . very interesting indeed . . . very amusing," temporised the Doctor, eyeing the stranger coldly, speculatively, and with most sinister promise.

"I gather that you wish to enter this Nursing-Home as a mental patient: that you wish it to be supposed that you've already been here for a week: that you wish to be kept under observation: treated for mental trouble; neurosis; and, more particularly, for *delusions*: and if possible, cured."

"You've said it all, Simmy," grinned the visitor.

"Well, suppose, for a start, you cure yourself —of the curious delusion that my name is Sim, Simmy or Simon."

"What *is* your real name, Doctor?"

"Er—I am Doctor Theodore Charters, M.D., London University, as you may see by reference to the Medical Register . . . Who, by-the-way, are you?"

"*Me?* Oh, I'm—er—Mr. Waye. Mr. John Waye."

"I don't remember the name."

"No, Doctor Theodore Charters. You don't remember the name, I'm sure . . . But you're going to . . . You're going to remember it as long as you live—and a bit longer perhaps . . ."

Mr. John Waye was taken to a vacant room, and, having retired to bed, fell into a deep sleep.

Concerning him, Dr. Charters held long and anxious converse with Mr. James, Dr. MacAdoo, the Matron of the Nursing-Home, and Nurse Jones.

CHAPTER III

"MR. JOHN WAYE," emerging from his room, once the cell of that Brother Ambrosius who later became a Cardinal Prince of the Church, proceeded in the direction of the great hall whence came the sounds of a gong which was being lustily banged by the butler.

Descending the worn stone staircase that led from the oaken gallery, John Waye crossed to where the great Burmese temple-bell swung, vibrated, and boomed beneath the blows of the padded stick.

Going down on one knee and applying his hand to his ear he achieved the pose of The Listener.

The butler, not easily surprised, after some five years of residence in The Monastery, nevertheless ceased from his labours and, with lowered arm and jaw, regarded Mr. Waye.

"Dinna ye hear it?" asked the latter, as the last boom died down sufficiently to render the human voice audible.

The butler swallowed and pulled himself together.

"Ar, Sir," he said. "I thought I heard something too."

"Have you a personal grudge against it?" enquired Mr. Waye.

"No, Sir. This here stick."

"What is your name?"

"Board, Sir. William Board."

"Thank you. Thank you. That's very splendid. Will you do something for me?" and the speaker put his hand suggestively into his pocket, causing a sound of chinking silver.

"Certainly, Sir. What might it be?"

"Let me know directly you find Lodging. I want to speak to him," and presenting the bewildered William Board with a small and particularly worthless-looking key, such as might have come from a child's pencil-box, John Waye continued his journey to the dining-room.

Regarding first the key and then the back of the retreating patient, William Board licked his lips, and the hand that closed upon the key took the shape of a quite useful fist.

"Lodging!" he murmured. "I can tell you in 'alf once where *you'll* find Lodging . . . before long. Colney 'Atch Loonatic Asylum."

And departing to his own place, he informed his friend the Cook that the Doctor had copped a fair balmy one this time.

Entering the beautifully proportioned dining-

room, once the Monastery Refectory, a room of which the vast table and the panelled ceiling were of the same date, John Waye was brightly and kindly welcomed by the Matron who sat at the head of the long table, a buxom kindly woman, beloved of all the patients, staff, and servants of the Monastery Nursing-Home. She had once been very pretty and was still distinctly attractive, no least part of her attraction being a low husky voice with a slight but perceptible Irish brogue.

"Come along then, Mr. Waye," she cried, as he entered, and some thirty pairs of eyes regarded him with interest. "I've kept you a place here beside meself. Come along now, and tell me all the things you like best to eat."

"Come along, darlint," she added as Marjorie Lauderdell came in. "Come and sit by me. This is Mr. Waye. It is the first time he has been able to get up . . ."

John Waye stared at the girl, in obvious amazement.

"*Rosemary!*" he whispered. "*Rosemary!*"

And then he bowed gravely and said:

"Good-evening."

"I think Doctor Charters said you'd been here a week," continued the Matron brightly, turning to John Waye.

"Yes. A week. It must be about a week," he agreed, as his eye held that of the speaker.

Marjorie Lauderdell regarded the new-comer with interest . . .

What an attractive, strong face.

Why had he said "Good-evening" at nine o'clock on a sunny morning? And why was his tie outside his waistcoat, and his hair ruffled in that absurd way? She wished she could walk round and straighten him up . . . Also tell him to stop wrinkling his forehead like that, and to turn his mouth up at the corners . . . Could she say something to make him smile? . . . His face would probably look quite different, quite kind and nice if he laughed. Such a fine strong face. Hard and bitter, and perhaps a little cruel, of course; but how powerful . . . How he must have suffered . . . And such a straight level look . . . He was looking hard at her . . . and, colouring slightly, Marjorie dropped her eyes to her plate.

John Waye tore his gaze from the girl and looked at her neighbour; and, following his glance, the Matron made casual introduction.

"Mr. Waye—Colonel Campball . . . Colonel Campball is our Oldest Inhabitant," she added, "and Mr. Waye the New Boy."

"*Oldest* inhabitant! Nothing of the sort, Madam," snapped Colonel Campball. "I'm still in my fifties. And I'm perfectly certain that Mrs . . ."

"Ah, there now, what have I said?" laughed

the Matron. "I meant to say ye're our Senior Officer, our . . ."

"Monarch of the Glen, ye ken," suggested Mr. Waye, and began to recite.

"'*The stag at eve had drunk his fill,*'"

he said, a remark that was the less well-received by reason of the fact that all knew the Colonel to be a noted dipsomaniac who, in Dr. Charters' watchful care, was learning the value of a dietary that included other things besides whisky.

With the effort of a lifetime, Marjorie Lauderdell refrained from laughter, and, with a sharp look at the face of Mr. Waye, decided that he had spoken in all innocence—perhaps.

"Haven't we met before?" said a soft voice on Mr. Waye's right, and, quickly turning to the lady who had just seated herself beside him, the new-comer swiftly scrutinised her face, without apparent anxiety.

"Mr. Waye—Miss Skinner," murmured the Matron.

"Met before? Before what, Madam?" asked Mr. Waye.

"Before this," replied Miss Skinner sharply.

"Before this what, Madam?"

"Before this . . . this *time*, of course."

"Oh no. *At* this time."

"I mean before . . . before . . ."

"Before this assembly, Madam? Yes, we

have met before this assembly. Good-morning. How do you do and, if it is not a rude question, how do you do it?"

"The man's mad!" gasped Miss Skinner; and, beaming, Mr. John Waye tapped his forehead.

"Mad as a hatter," growled Colonel Campball, gaffing a kipper.

"So they tell me," agreed John Waye pleasantly.

"Now does anyone here know why we say 'Mad as a hatter'?" he continued. "No? Well, I'll tell you an interesting thing. In Australia, where I have just come from, a man who takes up land in the Bush is called a hatter. These fellows, living alone as they do, in the Back Blocks of the Never-Never land, and never seeing a soul to speak to, except an occasional sun-downer, invariably get queer. Queer in the head, I mean. Talk to themselves, behave eccentrically, and, in time, go quite mad—like me—as all people do who live alone. Hence the phrase 'Mad as a hatter.'"

"How interesting," smiled Marjorie. "I've often wondered why hatters were supposed to be mad."

"Yes, but why are the Australian squatters called hatters?" chirped Miss Skinner, the rather cross-looking little lady who sat on the other side of Mr. Waye.

"That's done it," cried that gentleman,

and hastily snatching forth his handkerchief, applied it to his eyes and sobbed bitterly.

"Mad as a hatter," repeated Miss Skinner, and, taking her empty porridge-plate to the sideboard, returned with a load of egg and bacon, but to another seat, as far as possible from the one she had vacated.

Later in the day, Miss Skinner confided to Dr. Charters her considered opinion that he had no earthly right to bring lunatics into his Nursing-Home, life being already rendered sufficiently depressing by the presence of ordinary invalids.

Dr. Charters, as was his wont and policy, took a firm and brusque line with the complainant.

"What you want, Miss Skinner, is a Nursing-Home entirely to yourself. Don't you suppose . . . has it never occurred to you . . . that you depress other people, other invalids, quite as much as they depress you? And suppose you leave it to me to decide the question of whom I shall, and shall not, admit to my Nursing-Home. As to Mr. Waye being mad, I'm not going to discuss his symptoms with you, any more than I should discuss your symptoms with him. But you may take it from me that he is entirely harmless . . . Should you like to leave The Monastery, however, there's a very long waiting list . . ."

And Miss Skinner almost tearfully begged

the Doctor to believe that the very last thing she . . . and so forth.

Smiling to himself, Dr. Charters again reflected upon that interesting trait in human nature, shown by the curious fact that the ruder he was, the more popular he became ; and the more he invited people to leave his Nursing-Home, the more tenaciously they clung to it.

After breakfast, having read the morning paper with deepest interest, John Waye, now humming a stave, now talking audibly and pleasantly to himself, strolled about the grounds of The Monastery, incidentally making a complete tour of the great high wall that entirely surrounded them.

As usual, the monks of old had chosen not only a beautiful, but an easily defensible, site for their house. Originally in the centre of marshes that, at certain times of the year, were a lake, The Monastery grounds were now really an island, two branches of the little Stour forming a moat about the wall, the only normal access to The Monastery being, to this day, by the gate-house bridge.

Strolling down the glorious avenue of trees that, following the wall, encircled the estate, John Waye stopped as he came in sight of one particularly noble specimen, and, slowly nodding his head, smiled to himself.

Two men, a ladder, a rope and a great saw were employed, under the personal supervision of no less a person than Dr. Charters himself, in severing a huge limb from its parent trunk. This seemed a pity, for limb and trunk were both in perfect health and beautiful symmetrical maturity. The great branch, however, as John Waye was well aware, extended over the wall, across the stream, and, for some feet, above the meadow—from which an active man could, with a run and a leap, swing himself on to it, climb up and, without great peril, reach the trunk, and so to sacred ground.

Continuing his walk, John Waye approached the lodge, or gate-house, built on and across the inner end of the ancient stone bridge that spanned the stream.

Beneath the square archway, above which was a squat tower, high strong iron gates prevented access to the bridge itself, while at the far end of the bridge, a small door deep-set in a stone wall, prevented access from without, as well as egress from within.

It would be as difficult for an unauthorised person to leave this place as it would be to leave a gaol.

A gaol! . . . John Waye shuddered.

As he approached the great iron gates, with their close-set bars, the spiked tops of which

almost touched the stone roof above them, a huge man came out from a small door in one side of the gate-house, and eyed Mr. Waye enquiringly.

"Good-morning," said the latter. "You haven't seen my elephant, have you? I put it down for a moment and it's gone."

"Elephant, Sir!" replied the man reflectively, pushing back his bowler hat and scratching in the wiry stubble of his thatch, while his lips pursed beneath his heavy moustache, and his forehead and brows corrugated with his effort of memory.

"Elephant! Let's see now. What colour elephant might it a bin, Sir? Pinkish?"

"Oh dear me, no. White. Absolutely white. White as the driven—er—donkey."

"Well—no—no. I haven't acksherly seen it, Sir. Not your elephant, I haven't. Only me own white elephant, an' I can't lose 'er . . .

"Ar, 'ere she comes," he added, as a phenomenally tiny woman stepped forth and, with seeming vicious vindictiveness, banged a mat almost as large as herself.

"If I put 'er down for a moment, do you think she'd be gone, Sir, like yours? Naow. 'Ere to-day an' 'ere again termorrer' is 'er motter. No, Sir, I didn't see your white elephant, but you've seen mine—and you can 'ave 'er instead, if yer like."

"Oh thank you . . . thank you so much . . . that will be nice," replied John Waye gratefully. . . . "If I do not find my own. I'd rather do that, of course—because, after all, there's really nothing like one's own, is there?"

"There ain't nothink like mine. I'll take my Affy Davy on that," replied the man.

"So what I want to do," continued Mr. Waye, "is just to see if it got out. If you'll kindly open those gates I'll go for a little walk and have a look round."

"You can take it from me, Sir, no elephant ain't gone out this way. It couldn't, yer see . . . Not even through that key'ole, it couldn't."

"Oh well, if you're quite sure, I won't bother about it any further. I'll just go for a walk, if you'll kindly open the gates for me."

"I should go for a walk in the grounds if I was you, Sir. Plenty of room. Why, do you know, it's a nundred miles round the park wall —if you keeps on walking round long enough."

"I've been round the grounds. I'll have a stroll outside now, for a change," replied John Waye. "I can go out if I want to, I suppose, can't I?"

"Why cert'nly, Sir . . . cert'nly . . . everybody comes and goes as free as hair—when the Doctor says so."

"Oh the Doctor will say so, all right, in my case," Mr. Waye assured the gate-keeper.

"Of course he will, Sir . . . Of course he will."

"Open the gates then."

"Well, yer see, Sir, the Doctor ain't said it yet."

"Oh yes, he has."

"Not to me, he ain't, Sir."

"He tells you who may go out, and who may not, eh?"

"Well, Sir . . . in a manner o' speaking. Yer see, Sir, there's some gents, and some ladies too, for the matter o' that, as might—er—well, might come to some 'arm."

"How?"

"We-ell, Sir . . . they might think they was stronger than what they was . . . and they might walk so fur that they couldn't get back . . . or they might git lorst, jes' like your white elephant."

Suddenly the face of Mr. John Waye underwent a remarkable change. A slight squint disappeared from his eyes, his mouth ceased to sag and, as he produced a note-case from his pocket, the gate-keeper thought he looked much less idiotic.

John Waye, extracting a piece of paper, suggested that the gate-keeper might be able to decipher the writing thereupon.

It was a five-pound note.

"No, Sir," he said. "I couldn't."

"Perhaps you could read one with bigger print on it, could you?"

"No, Sir, no matter 'ow big. Me eyesight ain't what it was . . . not 'ere, anyhow."

"A sea-green incorruptible, eh?" smiled John Waye.

"Not so green either, Sir . . ."

"An' 'ere comes the Doctor hisself," he added as Dr. Charters, the morning paper in his hand, and followed by the gardeners who had been cutting the tree, approached the gate-house.

"Good-morning, Mr. Waye," he said breezily. "Going out for a walk?"

"Yes, Doctor. I was thinking of taking a stroll across the meadows."

"Wonderful old gate-house, isn't it?" observed the Doctor. "Strong."

"Very," agreed Mr. Waye. "Wonderful old gate-keeper too. Also strong."

The gate-keeper smiled, and, at an almost imperceptible nod from the Doctor, entered the gate-house, returned bearing a couple of large keys, and proceeded to open the inner, and then the outer, pair of gates.

Accompanied by the Doctor, John Waye crossed the bridge, halted and gazed around.

"No-o," he said slowly. "No-o. I don't think I'll go out—to-day, at any rate. It seems

to have disappeared altogether. Don't you wish yours would, Doctor ? "

" My what ? " enquired Dr. Charters.

" Your white elephant."

The two men eyed each other.

" Perhaps it will," observed the Doctor, as he turned away.

§ 2

Returning to the house and proceeding to his study, Dr. Charters rang for his secretary.

" Find Sister and Matron," he said. " I want to see them both."

" Now, Sir ? "

" No, yesterday. Or next month," snapped the Doctor, and his tone was unpleasant.

The girl flushed.

" I asked because I thought . . ."

" Kindly refrain from thought . . . and find Sister and Matron," interrupted the Doctor coldly. " Leave the letters."

A minute or two later, the two women entered together.

" Good-morning, Sister. Glad to see you back again. Good-morning, Matron," said the Doctor absently, looking up from his letters.

" Sit down a moment.

" Seen Mr. Waye yet, Sister ? " he continued a minute later. " The patient who came in while you were away."

"No, Doctor, not yet . . ."

"Oh, you will to-day, I expect . . . I think he'll be coming downstairs altogether, now. You'll find him a very pleasant chap. Queer, but probably harmless. Suffering from delusions. We must watch him carefully. . . . Humour him . . . And let me know if he's developing any fixed and persistent delusion. . . . Anything interesting. . . . His great trouble at the moment is that he has lost his elephant."

"Oh, Doctor! As bad as that? You aren't taking too big a risk, are you?" said the Sister, flashing brilliant eyes and teeth at the Doctor.

"How?" enquired Dr. Charters, staring at Sister Weldon.

"Well, we aren't allowed to take anybody who is really over the border-line, are we?"

"Suppose you leave that to me?"

"And we don't want anybody here who might possibly be, well—er—dangerous, do we?"

"Suppose you leave that to me also."

"Which nurse shall I put on to him?"

"No nurse. No treatment. No medicine. He's not ill. I told Matron and Nurse Jones to get him a room ready, and I have him under observation myself; and Dr. MacAdoo and I will look after him. I don't want anyone to interfere with him or take any obvious notice

of him. But everyone will keep an eye on him and report to you anything of interest."

"I see, Doctor."

"How's Miss Skinner this morning."

"Much the same, Doctor. Nurse Edwards says she offered her a diamond ring if she'd manage to get her out to Wilmerford."

"To the Post Office, I suppose? She couldn't get any at the Chemist's there, of course. You must be careful it doesn't come here. See that she opens all letters in your presence. Always give them to her yourself . . . A lot of cocaine or morphia can be packed in an innocent-looking letter . . .

"Any more parcels for Colonel Campball?"

Sister Weldon smiled.

"A box of books, Doctor."

"With a bottle of whisky under them?"

"Two . . . With books beautifully packed on all four sides."

"How's Miss Lauderdell this morning?"

"I thought she seemed rather depressed. Otherwise fairly all right . . . She began to tell me that she was sure she was better since she stopped taking Dr. MacAdoo's medicine . . . I'm afraid I snubbed her rather sharply."

"Thank you, Sister. I'll see you as usual, for reports. It was only about Mr. Waye that I sent for you. Tell them to let him alone, but to keep a sharp eye on him—and not to

be surprised at *anything* he says or does. He has delusions, as I said—the most prominent being that he has committed a crime and is surrounded by criminals. A most unusual case, in which I am particularly interested."

"One moment, Matron," he added as Sister Weldon arose and departed.

The door closed and the Doctor's manner changed.

"Get Manoel, Jimmy and Lou," he said quietly. "Don't all come together."

One by one, at a few minutes interval, Mr. James, the Matron, Nurse Jones and Dr. MacAdoo knocked, entered, and seated themselves in the Doctor's beautiful consulting-room.

"Seen the paper, Manoel?" asked the Doctor.

"Not yet. Anything in it?" replied Dr. Manoel Machado (*alias* Emmanuel MacAdoo) formerly of Santos, Bahia, Rio de Janeiro and Brazil generally.

"Very much in it," replied Dr. Charters, frowning as he again scanned the paper, open on the desk before him.

"He did it all-right."

"He was talking sense—and cold truth—that time" . . . he continued. "He's bumped Spider Schlitz off, sure enough . . . Listen to this," and Dr. Charters proceeded to read the account of the murder of a Mr. Theophilus

Webb, a wealthy race-horse owner, of Witherby End.

Apparently robbery had been the motive, as the place had been ransacked, and in such a manner as to make it fairly obvious that the murderer had been in search of something. The unfortunate victim of the dastardly crime had evidently been attacked as he sat, probably asleep, in an arm-chair before his library fire.

The police expected to make an early arrest, by reason of the facts that they had valuable clues in footprints, finger-marks and a curious anonymous letter. Moreover, a suspicious-looking person had been not only seen, but particularly noticed, by the station-master—who was also booking-office clerk and ticket-collector—at Wellingby Station, a few miles from Witherby End. From this station the said suspicious-looking person had taken the early morning train to Southampton.

"Wonder if he got what he went for?" murmured Mr. James, eyeing Dr. Charters meaningly, if not suspiciously.

"And whether he wrote the anonymous letter himself," mused the Doctor. "I don't see why he shouldn't have done it, to put the cops on a false scent," he added . . . "I allow he had it in for Spider, and scattered a few drawers of the desks and the bureaux to make it look like a burglary."

"Perhaps some pard of Spider's—who Spider double-crossed—croaked in gaol and put this guy wise before he died," suggested Mr. James with another meaning look, as he caught the Doctor's eye, "and he came and collected something as soon as he got out."

"Yes," agreed the Doctor, eyeing Mr. James hardily, "it may have been that . . ."

"What was he after, Doc?" enquired Dr. MacAdoo. "And what's the story?"

"After? Oh, some papers and boodle," replied the Doctor, his gaze again meeting that of Mr. James. "That is, if anybody did send him . . . Or perhaps this Waye and Spider Schlitz made a haul together and were both sent up on another count, just as they'd cached it. Maybe that Spider, who'd covered his tracks better than Waye, got a shorter jolt, came out before Waye and did the dirty on him, skipped with the lot and disappeared . . .

"Spider had the gall to come and see me here, once . . ." he added. "Thought he was going to make a touch. I told him to go while the going was good, and he went.

"'*Mr. Theophilus Webb of Witherby End*'!" sneered Dr. Charters, and appeared to be about to spit upon the lovely old Persian rug.

"'Mr. Theophilus Webb of Witherby End'!" he repeated. "Yes, if this mysterious Waye stiff hadn't blown in and told me he'd

done it—the moment I'd read this account I should have said that someone had come over from Chi on purpose and done what he had promised to do."

"Well, who the devil is this mysterious Waye, anyway?" asked Dr. MacAdoo.

"Yes. Who on earth is he, Jimmy?" said Dr. Charters, again turning to Mr. James.

"Search me," replied that gentleman. "He's got me guessing. But I'd swear I'd seen him."

"Does he get you that way, Fanny?" he added, turning to the Matron.

"He does," was the reply. "The moment that guy walked in, I said to meself, 'Phwat's this? I know your phiz, me bhoy.' And then I said, 'No, sure it's yeself that's remindin' me of somewan else.'"

"And you haven't got him taped, Lou?"

"Nope," replied Nurse Jones. "But I have seen him in Chi, I'll swear. Him or his double. Guess I'll talk to him and watch him while he utters, and notice when he laughs and coughs and blows his nose, or sneezes. I'll place him . . . I'll get him."

"P'raps he used to wear a hairy face," mused Matron. "A beard is a good disguise—when you cut it off . . .

"Or put it on, either," she added, smiling lovingly at Dr. Charters.

"What are we to do with him?" asked Dr. MacAdoo.

"Bump him off, I say," he continued. "Say the word . . . '*Homem morto não falla*' . . .[1]"

"Bump nothing," interrupted Dr. Charters sharply. "Don't you suppose he thought of that before he butted in here and showed his hand? As I was telling Jimmy last night, he'd got it all nicely cut and dried before he came. He's the wise guy all right, and don't you make any mistake . . . Why, he's actually got a solicitor. A *solicitor*! Can you beat it? And he's coming to see him here to-morrow . . . And our mysterious Mr. Waye says he is going to have him here twice a week. How's that for taking no chances . . .? Bump him off! . . . And another thing, my lads and lasses, he has actually had the nerve to ask what he called 'your distinguished Harley Street neighbour and colleague, Sir Bernard Matthieson,' to come here and meet me in consultation about his mental condition!"

The doctor's hearers sat in open-mouthed silence.

"Bluff," growled Mr. James. "Bluff. Bump him off before he does any more mischief. He knows too much. . . ."

"Yes, what *does* he know? And what the

[1] "Dead men tell no tales."

devil doesn't he know? And who *is* he, once again?" he added.

"Yes, and why exactly should he come to *us*, to hide?" asked Dr. MacAdoo.

"Well, as to that, one thing at a time," replied Dr. Charters.

"See here now. His bluff won't want any calling . . . it'll call itself. That London solicitor he talked about, either will, or will not, turn up here. Sir Bernard Matthieson either will, or will not, write and ask me if I have any objection to his meeting me in consultation about his patient, Mr. Waye. We might look a bit silly if we couldn't produce him; *and* moreover, he says he's written to half-a-dozen people, including his bank-manager, giving this address and saying he would on no account leave here without letting them know his change of address in advance."

"Bluff and bunkum," growled Mr. James, *sotto voce*. "Bump him off."

"Secondly, as to what he knows, and what he doesn't know," continued the Doctor, "I'd give something to be able to answer both those questions, but, believe me, he not only knows a deuce of a lot, but a damn sight too much. . . . Nevertheless, bumping off is easier said than done . . .

"And easier done than undone," he added. "And as for who he is, I don't know him from

Adam, but he knows me all-right, and he knows Jimmy all-right. Whether he knows Manoel Machado, 'Frisco Fanny and Louie the Lady, remains to be seen. . . .

"Lastly—why he should come to *us*, to hide, is pretty clear. Where could a man lie-up better than in a Nursing-Home—a famous Nursing-Home of the highest repute, and patronized by the Best People, eh?

"Especially when he's got the bulge on the Boss," observed Mr. James, unkindly, "and knows he can make him fall for it, for fear he should squeal."

"So you see it's a cinch then," said Dr. Charters patiently. "Can't bump him off, for fear we have to produce him. Can't kick him out, or let the police get him, because he'll tell the world."

"What do we do if Scotland Yard trails him here?" asked Nurse Jones.

"Tell them to take him and hang him quick," growled Mr. James.

"Very helpful," snarled Dr. Charters. "Where'd *you* be, as well as some other people, by the time he's said his say? . . . And, mark you, he's in a nasty mood. He's hostile. Very nasty; very hostile; very vindictive indeed. Wish to Heaven I could place him, for he places us all-right, and means to see that we get what's coming to us."

" Well, what'll we do if Scotland Yard trails him here ? " repeated Nurse Jones.

" His idea is an alibi. Been here a week—as you know," replied the Doctor.

" Dam' difficult," observed the Matron, " though it was a real sloice of luck that Sister Weldon had been on leave . . . I towld her the Doctor didn't want her or anybody else to go into Room 19. I towld her the man in there wasn't a patient at all, but a friend of the Doctor's own—perfectly well, but ' eccentric ', and the doctor had persuaded him to come and visit him—without telling the poor felly he wanted to have him under observation. . . . I think she swallowed it."

" Sure the creature thinks more about her own face than her duties," she added virtuously.

" Yes. Difficult perhaps, but we've got to do it," continued Dr. Charters, " and with two doctors, the matron, and a nurse, we ought to get away with it. . . . If one of the dicks was sitting in that chair asking me if a tall ugly clean-shaven guy had bluffed his way in here, dressed in grey flannels and a blue shirt, I shouldn't recognise the description . . . I can't remember all the patients' clothes, can I ? . . .

" And if the detective asked if he might go around, I'd promise him every help and facility . . . And if he said there was, to his certain knowledge, in this Nursing-Home, a guy who

rather resembled a description they'd had of Mr. Theophilus Webb's alleged murderer, and identified this mysterious Waye tough, I should say:

"'Him? Why he was in bed here when that murder was committed. Been here for days.'

"Then if I rang for my colleague, Dr. Emmanuel MacAdoo, who is in charge of the case, and said:

"'Oh, by the way, Doctor, on what date did Mr. Waye come into the Nursing-Home?' and the Doctor said he'd been here since Tuesday week, and had never left his bed; and then I sent for the nurse in charge of the case, and the Matron who got his room ready, wouldn't that dick apologise for all the trouble he'd given me, and push off?"

"Sure thing," agreed Mr. James. "You'll bluff the Devil when your time comes, and shove a cigar into Saint Peter's mouth when he asks for your finger-prints."

"Talking of which, mightn't the dick ask for Waye's finger-prints?" asked Nurse Jones.

"No," replied the Doctor. "Certainly not. Even a Scotland Yard dick wouldn't have the face to sit there and ask Dr. Theodore Charters, of Harley Street and The Monastery, to let him take the finger-prints of a gentleman whom he guaranteed to have been here, ill in bed, on the date when some murder or other was committed.

" Anyhow, we've got to take a chance," he added, " for this ugly devil's got us in a cleft stick . . . He's got us as tight as we've got him.

" And he's got a second string for a let-off. This bug-house business . . . If he's pinched after he leaves here, or outside while this is his headquarters, he's going to act the lunatic if we refuse to risk perjury and give him his alibi. He'll try to get past, as not responsible for his actions . . . detained during the King's pleasure . . . then recover his sanity gradually, all in good time."

" He's certainly provided himself with plenty of witnesses that he's mad, all-right," observed the Matron.

Suddenly Mr. James smote his thigh.

" *Got* him," he said. " *Got* him, b' Jees! He's mad, is he? Right! You and Doc MacAdoo have a talk to this Sir Bernard Matthieson when he comes, and call us and any-god's-number of other people, in evidence—and *get him certified* mad before he squeals on us. Get our blow in first. . . . Put him away for keeps—and *then*, the more the poor lunatic blows the gaff and tells the world—the more they'll humour him and say ' *Yes, yes . . . Sure, Bo* '—while they put the handcuffs and strait-waistcoat on him and sling him in the padded cell."

Dr. Charters and his colleagues stared at the speaker, dazzled by the effulgence of this truly brilliant idea.

"So-help-me-Hannah!" ejaculated the Doctor. "You've said something, Jimmy. Get him certified mad, and put away for life; and the more he acts mad now, the tighter he'll tie himself up . . . The clever Mr. Waye! . . . Out of his own mouth . . . That's really funny . . ." And the Doctor's laugh was unpleasant.

CHAPTER IV

HURRYING along the somewhat dark and gloomy corridor that led from the hall to Dr. MacAdoo's consulting-room, John Waye, encountering the latter gentleman, either accidentally or intentionally, stumbled against him.

"I beg your pardon, my dear Doctor," he said in Portuguese, "'*De noite todos os getos são pardos*'."[1]

"'*La vão os pés onde quer o coracão*,"[2] growled Dr. MacAdoo, in reply.

"Oho! We Scots speak Portuguese, do we?" smiled John Waye. "Now I wonder whether Portuguese is really our native tongue—because we were born and bred and educated in Rio Janeiro, and practised in Bahia and Santos until we came a very nasty cropper, eh? Still, it's a dreary hole, Santos . . . No place for a brilliant man, eh, Manoel Machado? Even if one practises on the southern side of the suspension-bridge, eh?"

"Come in here a minute," growled Dr.

[1] "All cats are grey at night."

[2] "The feet go where the heart wants them to."

MacAdoo, turning back and leading the way into his consulting-room.

"You're a very clever fellow, aren't you?" he said, turning the key in the lock of the door, and throwing himself down in his arm-chair, opposite to the one in which Mr. Waye had already seated himself.

"So-so . . . So-so," smiled Mr. Waye pleasantly.

"And you know Santos, do you?" smiled Dr. MacAdoo equally pleasantly, as he tapped a cigarette.

"'*Ao medico, ao advogado, e ao abbade fallar verdade*'," [1] quoted John Waye, "I don't know Santos really well. But I know one or two of its exports—coffee, Brazil nuts, and Manoel Machado. Also something of its history and of Manoel's, too."

Dr. Emmanuel MacAdoo's mouth fell open, and himself fell silent.

"Yes, my friend, I know exactly why Manoel Machado became an export of Brazil, and how he contrived to get himself upon the list of imports of the United States of America."

"You think you know a lot, don't you?" smiled Dr. MacAdoo, but his face, in spite of the sneer, gave the impression that he was inclined to agree with John Waye in this respect.

[1] "To your doctor, your lawyer, and your priest, speak the truth."

"Oh, quite a lot," was the reply. "I even know how Manoel Machado then became an export of the said United States of America . . . And why it's quite unlikely that he will ever be re-imported."

Dr. MacAdoo's smile evaporated, and his olive-brown face became olive-grey.

"No. He'll stop in England," continued John Waye presently . . . "for ever. *Requiescat in pace.*"

"You even know the future, eh?" temporised Dr. MacAdoo, "as well as the past . . . And you don't know Santos? . . . But you *do* know Chicago?"

"Do I, my dear Manoel? I don't remember saying so."

"Look here, what's the game?" blustered Machado. "If it's blackmail, you're wasting your time on me . . . apart from the fact that I am a Scotsman, and a man of spotlessly blameless life . . . You can't get blood out of a stone."

"'*Buscar agua em fonte secca*,'[1]," as we say in Brazil, eh, Mr. Scotsman?" jeered John Waye. "Only a person as mad as I am would do that, what?"

"Quite so," agreed Dr. MacAdoo, "and look here, I'll tell you something," he added quickly. "You want to give the impression that you're

[1] "It would be to look for water in a dry well."

mad. Well, you couldn't do it better than by talking as you are now, either inside the house or out of it. But clever as you are, you'd better take a tip from me before Sir Bernard Matthieson comes—if he's coming. If you want him to think you've gone mad, and you hope to get away with it, don't *tell* him you are mad, see? For no madman in this world ever yet thought he was mad."

"More likely to think everybody else is, eh?" smiled John Waye.

"Exactly," agreed Dr. MacAdoo. "If you tell Sir Bernard Matthieson that this is a lunatic asylum, and that the doctor's mad, and I'm mad, and everybody else, except you, is mad, you'll have some chance of getting away with it. . . . But if you go up to Sir Bernard and tap your forehead and say 'I'm mad,' he'll merely turn to Dr. Charters and say, 'I don't know what this fellow's game is, but he's malingering' . . . See?"

"Now that's very kind of you, Manoel . . . very kind. But why, if one might ask, are you so anxious that I should succeed in persuading Sir Bernard that I am mad?"

And Mr. Waye's narrowed eyes searchingly studied the mobile countenance of Dr. MacAdoo.

"Well, I thought that was the great idea in view of possible—or shall we say probable—

unpleasantness consequent upon your recent activities at Witherby End."

"Yes, yes, my dear Manoel. But why this kindly anxiety that I should succeed in convincing Sir Bernard of my insanity?"

Dr. MacAdoo, with an eloquent shrug of the shoulders and an outward motion of the hands, rarely employed by Scotsmen, waived the question.

"I have a kind heart," he said, "and wish to be helpful."

John Waye's laugh expressed more of genuine amusement than of compliment.

"Well, well, Manoel," he said, "one good turn deserves another. I'll give you a piece of useful advice now. And you think it over . . . think hard, Manoel. I advise you to buy a long spoon."

"A long spoon?" enquired Dr. MacAdoo in some puzzlement.

"Yes, a very long one, for you're certainly supping with the Devil—and his name is Charters, at the moment. And you want to be the wise rat, too, Manoel."

"Rat?" enquired Dr. MacAdoo.

"For you're most certainly in a sinking ship . . . And you'll shortly want a friend indeed, Manoel."

"A friend?"

"Yes, for you'll be in the very gravest need."

"Now that's very kind of you, Waye . . . very kind . . . But—to quote yourself—why, if one might ask, are you so very anxious on my account?"

"To quote *your*self, my dear Manoel—I have a kind heart, and wish to be helpful," John Waye assured him and rose to his feet.

"Now you think over what I have said," he added, "and grasp the fact that Charters is double-crossing you . . . Has he told you what I really went to Witherby End for? What I went there to get? . . . Has he told you about Chink Dorson, Spider Schlitz, and himself, and the colossal fortune? Has he told you who 'Mr. James' is? Has he treated you fair and square and let you in on everything? . . . What does he pay you? Why man, you ought to be making *thousands* . . . And pretty soon, too . . . The game's nearly up . . . And another thing . . . Do you know what he's going to make out of the Marjorie Lauderdell business? . . . What share is he giving you for that job, by the way?"

"*Sst!*" hissed Dr. MacAdoo springing to his feet. "*Hush* . . . What do you mean?"

"Why should I 'hush'?" asked John Waye. "Anything wrong?"

"What do you mean by 'What's he going to make out of the Marjorie Lauderdell business'?"

" Just what I say. And I asked what he is giving you for doing it ? And, I might add—what are you giving *her* ? "

Dr. MacAdoo sat down again limply.

" Who are you ? " he whispered. " A dick ? "

" Would you turn King's evidence, if I were ? " asked John Waye.

Dr. MacAdoo's face was a study, in its mingled and changing expressions of bewilderment, shrewdness, fear, hope, and, finally, relief.

" No. You aren't a cop. You killed Spider Schlitz," he said, " and got in here and announced it before it was discovered . . . What do you mean about Marjorie Lauderdell ? . . . Look here . . . Let's put our cards on the table . . . You tell me who you are, and all you know, and what you're after . . . And I'll come across."

" You, will, eh ? "

" I will."

" On your word of honour ? "

" On my sacred word of honour."

Again John Waye's peal of hearty laughter expressed more of genuine amusement than of compliment.

" Look here, Manoel," he said, resting a hand on Dr. MacAdoo's shoulder, and bringing his face near to the pallid visage of that man of honour, " you tell the good Dr. Charters that you want a half share of the Lauderdell

ten thousand pounds. Don't forget . . . ten thousand pounds . . ."

And turning, John Waye unlocked the door of Dr. MacAdoo's consulting-room.

"Don't go!" cried Dr. MacAdoo. "Won't you stop a little longer—and have a drink?"

"No thank you, Manoel," replied John Waye as he opened the door. "'*Guarde-vos Deus de physico experimentador . . . e de asno ornejador,*'"[1] as we say in Brazil, eh?"

§ 2

From the consulting-room of Dr. Emmanuel MacAdoo, the eccentric Mr. Waye went in search of that gentleman's colleague, Dr. Studley, the third and best-beloved of the doctors who, with undeniable skill, care, and efficiency, coped with the many and varied genuine and imaginary ills to which the minds and bodies of the inmates of The Monastery were heirs.

Dr. Studley was engaged, and was likely to remain so for some little while, as two ladies were waiting their turns to see him. Seated on a deep settee in the recess in the corridor which led to Dr. Studley's consulting-room, they gossiped and exchanged scandal.

Unobtrusively, John Waye drew near, and possessed his soul in patience.

[1] "God keep us from a doctor who—tries experiments . . . and from an ass that brays."

"*No*, my dear," said Mrs. Platte, a tall dark Spanish-looking woman of some forty summers, thin to the point of emaciation, with coal-black hair and burning eyes; a woman who, as the whimsical Mr. Waye informed himself, looked as though she had been slowly burnt alive, and, never having been properly put out, was still smouldering.

"*No*, my dear. You don't say! Drugs *and* drink *and* vice! Well, well, well! And such a nice man. And such a splendid doctor too. But Mrs. Skinner, are you sure he . . ."

"Sure, my dear!" interrupted the narrator of this particular piece of scandal, a small insignificant woman with rather untidy hair, dowdy clothes and a total lack of any kind of distinction—a woman whom John Waye watched with great interest.

"Sure? Why, my husband's a doctor, and was at Edinburgh University with him. He knew him quite well, a most brilliant young man, and could have climbed to any height. Absolutely brilliant, but he drank even then, drank like a fish. He was *locum tenens* to a man in Birmingham before he had a practice of his own, and let him down most frightfully. Lost him every one of his patients. Went his round absolutely drunk and when people told him their symptoms, he laughed so that he fell off his chair . . . Told Lady Hibberdy, the

Mayor's wife, that she was a fat old fool, and that what she wanted wasn't medicine so much as a month's hard labour. Do her all the good in the world. And then one day they brought a street accident into his surgery, and though he was so drunk that he hardly seemed to know which was the patient, he performed what all the doctors said was absolutely the most marvellous operation that had ever been done. I did hear that when the man started to die he made an incision and put his hand in and tickled his heart or massaged it or something, so that it kept going. Simply *mar*-vellous . . . It made him quite famous.

"And then he made himself infamous and got six months' imprisonment for going to some poor working-woman in the middle of the night and falling into a drunken sleep while she died from want of attention. That was the ruin of him—and he took to drugs as well as drink . . . a regular addict . . . My husband ran into him in the Strand and knew him at once. He tried to beg from my husband, Dr. Skinner, a most kind-hearted man . . . regular Good Samaritan to him . . . put him on his feet . . . absolutely saved him . . . He himself told my husband all this . . .

"It was he brought him here to Dr. Charters you know, one of the first patients when The Monastery was turned into a Nursing-Home

. . . been here ever since . . . Brilliantly clever . . . probably the only man in England who can really cure rheumatism. And surgery, my dear! He could take your eye out, do an operation on the back of it, and put it back again."

"Just think of that now," said Mrs. Platte. "Drink and drugs . . . And vice . . . You said vice, my dear."

"Oh yes, my dear, terrible . . . His lady patients . . . why . . ."

The door opened and a patient, a lame boy, emerged.

"Miss Skinner?" called Dr. Studley—a clean-shaven, grey-haired, though young-looking man, the smile of whose kindly clever face was a medicine in itself—and Miss Skinner, springing up, bustled into the consulting-room.

"Excuse me, Madam," said Mr. Waye, throwing himself at the feet of Mrs. Platte, placing his head upon the ground and peering beneath the settee.

"What on earth are you doing, my good man?" ejaculated Mrs. Platte, rising hurriedly.

"Looking for my cobra," replied Mr. Waye, "I put it down for a moment, and when I turned round, it had dashed down the corridor and I was just in time to see it dart in here."

With a look of horror Mrs. Platte fled, as Mr. Waye, rising, observed :

"Perhaps that was it that went in there just now. It looked very like a snake to me."

As John Waye left Dr. Studley's consulting-room, half-an-hour later, he said:

"Excuse my apparent idle curiosity, Doctor, but wasn't that a Mrs. Skinner who came in before me?"

"The lady's name is Skinner," smiled Dr. Studley.

"Ah, I thought so. Husband a doctor?"

"No. Never been married. She is a *Miss* Skinner," replied Dr. Studley.

"Ah, thank you, Doctor. My mistake."

In the corridor he met the returning Mrs. Platte.

"He, he!" he giggled as that lady shrank aside. "He, he! It was my cobra. Name of Skinner," and raising his hand to his ears he rapidly coiled and uncoiled his index fingers beside them.

"The man's *mad*!" gasped Mrs. Platte, and hurried on to lay this information before Dr. Studley. . . .

"You surprise me," said that doctor, "for he struck me as a very sane, pleasant and most charming person. . . ."

§ 3

That night, a knock fell upon the door of the bed-sitting-room occupied by Mr. James.

It was this gentleman's habit and routine to retire, for an hour, to this room, after dining with the Doctor, and playing a game of billiards, or of cards, with such of the men-patients of the Nursing-Home as had sufficient mental and physical vigour thus to expend, and sufficient money to lose.

In his room he would relax and, removing dinner-jacket and collar, take his ease in his shirt-sleeves.

About eleven, he would resume these uncomfortable insignia of rank and respectability, and again go on duty—the duty of seeing that the men patients retired to rest at a reasonable hour, comported themselves with restraint and discretion, and were all physically present if not always mentally quite correct. Thereafter he would patrol the house as though it were besieged—or might at any moment be attacked—or burglariously entered. Two or three times, in the night, he would repeat this tour of the house; a watch-dog, apparently, that expected, or, at any rate, was always ready for, a visit from the wolf. . . .

"Come in," he called sharply, as the knocking startled him from reminiscent reflections and dreams of stratagems and spoils; and, the door opening, he beheld John Waye.

The face of Mr. James did not betray his surprise, but its expression, so far as it had any

expression at all, was one of concentration . . . awareness . . . wariness.

And that of John Waye was not dissimilar in expression. The gentle and admirable Dr. Studley would hardly have recognised him as the agreeable and charming visitor of that afternoon.

Mr. James, remaining seated and staring hard, waited for Waye to speak.

But John Waye did not speak, and the tense silence grew uncomfortable.

Mr. James continued to wait.

So did John Waye; and the silence grew more and more uncomfortable.

At length it grew unbearable—for Mr. James; and he spoke.

"Well, Mister Mysterious Waye?" he growled harshly.

"Well, Gunman Gryde?" replied John Waye, and Mr. James's ejaculatory reply was uttered, perhaps fortunately, beneath his breath. "And so the Infant Prodigy, the Boy Gunman, valued and respected citizen of New York, has changed his trade as well as his country . . . Or has he only changed the tools of his trade . . . a different branch of his profession . . . The march of progress eh? . . . A far cry from Hinky Dink's honkatonk to The Monastery! . . . From monkey into monk, eh?"

Mr. James rose from his seat, an unwonted

gleam in his cold dull eyes, and took a stride in the direction of the man whose bitter and contemptuous banter had stung him into action.

"You . . ." he snarled, and at the beginning of the word his hands were empty; at the end of it, a flat and ugly automatic pistol was thrust hard against John Waye's stomach.

"Tools of me trade, did ye say?" he growled ferociously, between clenched teeth. "Got anything against this tool?"

"No, you've got it against me," replied John Waye pleasantly . . . "But you daren't use it, Gunman Gryde. You haven't the pluck. You're just a cheap play-boy, and the most cowardly cur and reptile on two legs. *Children* are your game, Gunman Gryde."

"Put 'em up, quick," growled Mr. James. "*Quick*, I said."

"I heard you. You said it twice," replied John Waye. "If I take my hands out of my pockets, it won't be to hold 'em up. Put that thing away, and listen to what I've got to say to you—and I don't mind mentioning for your benefit that I'm not a patient man . . . and have a great dislike for reptiles."

"You going to put 'em up while you can?" snarled Mr. James, prodding John Waye in the stomach with the muzzle of the automatic.

"We-ell, I shan't put 'em up when I can't, shall I?" replied Waye, slowly removing his

hands from his pockets. "And besides, I've always thought—when I've seen it done on the stage or on the pictures, and, indeed, in real life—that this close-to 'hands-up' business, and sticking your gun against a man's stomach, is extremely silly and theatrical, because as the poor victim begins, or pretends, to raise his hands, he's only got to go *so* . . ."

And John Waye's right hand, moving like lightning, seized that of Mr. James, knocking it aside as it did so. Expertly giving it a swift, powerful, and dislocating wrench, Waye twisted the gunman's wrist with powerful violence. James uttered a gasping cry of pain, and the pistol fell to the ground, as Waye's left hand closed on his assailant's throat.

"You foul, unspeakable, loathsome scum," he growled, shaking him as a terrier shakes a rat . . .

"But I mustn't lose my temper and get rough," he added, as, with a powerful heave, he lifted Mr. James and flung him with crashing force against the wall.

Mr. James, his left hand at his throat, gasped, shook his head, and swiftly stooped to where his pistol lay.

Stooping he snatched it and, as he turned, in the act of rising erect, received so terrible a kick beneath his outstretched arm that with a groan, he collapsed and lay inanimate.

Crossing to the electric bell beside the fireplace, John Waye pressed it. A minute later there came a tap at the door, and a maid entered to his cry of, "Come in."

"Will you kindly tell Dr. Charters to come at once to Mr. James's room. . . . He has been taken ill."

With a swift shocked glance at the prostrate figure, and a prompt:

"I'll try to find him, Sir. . . . I'll tell Sister," the girl hurried away . . .

Without the formality of a knock, a nurse hurried into the room.

"What is it? . . . What's happened? . . . Mary says . . ." cried Nurse Jones, and, seeing the prostrate form of Mr. James, hurried to where he lay upon his face.

"What's happened?" she repeated, endeavouring to turn Mr. James upon his back. "Can't you help me?"

John Waye regarded the face of Nurse Jones from which, he fancied, something had peeped out.

Was she a little less impersonal and detached than well-trained nurses usually are? Or was it merely that she took the very proper view that it was the business and duty of Fate to inflict sickness, accidents, fits and general affliction only upon "inmates" of The Monastery—and not upon members of the staff?

" ' What's happened ' ? " replied Waye. " Oh, he had a—seizure. Yes, we might certainly call it a seizure—of the throat . . . As for help, I think Dr. Charters is the proper person . . . to diagnose the case."

Nurse Jones' eye fell upon the automatic pistol as she succeeded in turning the body of Mr. James face-upward.

" My God ! " she whispered and glared accusingly at Mr. Waye, who stooping, picked up the pistol. " You've murdered him."

Smiling, John Waye shook his head.

" Not yet," he said pleasantly, and, as he spoke, the door suddenly opened and Dr. Charters strode in.

" What's this ? " he demanded. " Jimmy's not . . ." and as his glance flashed from the pistol in John Waye's hand to the motionless form of Mr. James, beside whom the nurse knelt, the mask of inscrutability fell from Dr. Charters' face, and the blood receded from it.

" You've shot him, you . . ." he cried, and flinging himself down by Mr. James, placed his hand upon his heart. " Where's he hit ? "

" He isn't hit, so much as kicked," observed Waye, tossing the pistol contemptuously on to the table. " I rang for you—to request you to keep your dog under proper control—for your own sake as well as mine. Tell him

not to bark at me again, and see that he obeys you—or I shall have to deal with him myself."

Snatching up the pistol, the Doctor smelt the muzzle and, reassured, laid it down again.

Mr. James groaned, opened his eyes, drew a deep breath, placed his hand to his side and groaned again.

"He's mad," he groaned. "Sprang on me like a mad bear-cat . . . took me unawares . . . nearly killed me . . . he's mad."

"Raving mad," agreed Nurse Jones. "I came in just in time to save Mr. James's life. The man was standing there, pointing the pistol at Mr. James's head as he lay senseless."

John Waye's laugh was one of genuine amusement.

"Oho!" said he, eyeing Nurse Jones with renewed interest, and nodding his head as one who has learnt something.

"So the admired and popular Nurse Jones is one of us, eh?" he smiled.

Nurse Jones' mouth shut like a steel trap, and the glance with which Dr. Charters favoured her, as he stooped to help Mr. James into the arm-chair, was not kindly.

"Look here, you," he said, turning on John Waye, "What's the game? If you want to lie up here, can't you do it in peace and quiet? Can't you make that much decent return

for shelter and hospitality? Who asked you to come here and make yourself a damned nuisance, upsetting the place and everything in it . . . And, once again, who are you and what do you want ? . . . Anyway, I never saw a man looking for worse trouble—nor more likely to get it."

"I must be mad," smiled Mr. Waye.

"You've said it," replied Dr. Charters, and his voice was steely. "And here are three witnesses to an unprovoked and savage attack upon one of the staff."

"*Three ?*" smiled Waye. "All eye-witnesses of the unprovoked assault! Splendid. And here I am, talking as rationally as you like; and I give you my word of honour—I got that expression from our Manoel Machado—I give you my word of honour that I have not the faintest recollection of making an 'unprovoked' and savage attack upon one of the staff. It's perfectly clear I'm not responsible for my actions, isn't it ?"

"Perfectly," agreed Dr. Charters, evidently exercising great and creditable restraint.

"Absolutely . . . Absolutely clear . . ." said Nurse Jones.

"Mad dog," groaned Mr. James.

"Yes," continued Dr. Charters. "Perfectly clear that you are not responsible for your actions, and that you are a dangerous menace

to the staff and patients of this Nursing-Home, and to Society generally.

" And three witnesses to it," smiled Waye, crossing the room and opening the door. " Half-Hung Simon . . . *Louie the Lady*—and Gunman Gryde," he added, as he turned about, smiled upon them, and departed.

" ——! And what in hell d'you know about that ? " asked Louie the Lady, with a quite un-lady-like oath, as she gazed at Dr. Charters who stared blankly at the door that closed softly behind Mr. Waye.

" He's for it ! " he said at length. " He must be put away."

" Or else we shall be," he added, breaking the heavy silence of the room.

CHAPTER V

"'ERE 'e is, Sister, well-fed, well-groomed and never sick or sorry, and simply busting with oats," facetiously declared ex-Squadron-Sergeant-Major William Levitt, late of the Queen's Bays and present gate-keeper to Dr. Charters, as he wheeled Sister Weldon's bicycle out from the gate-house and produced his keys.

"Thank you, Sergeant," smiled Sister Weldon, "How you must miss your horses. I can sympathise, for I know myself what it is to have to give up riding."

"Ah, well, Miss," sighed the gate-keeper cheerfully, "we'll 'ave to give up walking too, someday . . ."

Mounting her bicycle, Sister Weldon set forth on her seven-mile ride to Herepath, of which village, her brother, the Reverend Laurence Weldon, was Vicar.

With a shrug of her broad shoulders she cast off the cares and anxieties of her onerous and responsible position, and thanked Heaven for

a lovely afternoon on what she called her "afternoon out."

"Ar," reflected Mr. Levitt, as his eye followed the retreating form of the Sister. "That's the gal as I ought to of married. . . . 'Ere 'Epzibah," he said, as his wife emerged from the gate-house, bearing gifts for the fowls, "do you know who that is there?"

"Course I do, you old fool."

"Ho, that's all right then, I needn't tell yer then. . . . That's the gal I ought to of married."

Gazing up at the face of her lord, Hepzibah examined it carefully.

"I was going to say '*I wish you 'ad*,'" she observed, "but she's a nice lady, and I wouldn't wish 'er that."

At the sound of the opening of his garden-gate, the Reverend Laurence Weldon looked up from his book, and then, with a beaming smile of welcome, rose up from his chair under the huge chestnut tree that shaded the Vicarage lawn.

"Dear old Angela! Angel by name and angel by nature," he thought to himself as he advanced to meet his sister.

The enduring love that existed between this brother and sister was based upon profound respect and sympathetic understanding, each knowing the unselfish and well-concealed philanthropy and practical goodness of the other.

He, of how his sister devoted her considerable income to helping the poor, and her more considerable abilities to nursing the sick. She, of how he, crushing ambition and neglecting worldly opportunity, devoted his life in rustic obscurity to the literal cure of souls; and to a labour of love, help, and peacemaking, as guide, philosopher and friend of his humble flock.

"Well, Angela! How nice of you to devote your 'afternoon off' to visiting your brother, instead of to 'walking out' with Dr. Studley or with some other nice young man. Or are there no other nice young men, just now, at The Monastery?"

"Oh, a lovely one, my dear," laughed his sister, kissing him warmly. "I'll tell you all about him when I've got my breath . . . Pff . . ."

"Let me take your bicycle, and you come and sit down. We'll have tea out here . . ."

"And who's the lovely young man?" asked Laurence Weldon, half an hour later, as, declining more tea, and producing pipe and pouch from capacious pockets, he settled down to what he considered the second best smoke of the day.

"Oh, my dear, such a joke. And yet not altogether a joke for poor Dr. Charters. A new patient. Such a nice man, but *mad* as a March hare . . . Mad as a hatter."

"Oh? What's his line?" smiled the Vicar,

as he struck a match on the thigh of his crossed leg.

"Oh, all sorts of lines . . . mad as a March hare . . . I'll tell you . . ."

"He came while I was away for my holiday. Apparently Dr. Charters thought he could do something for him, but it's hopeless . . . hopeless . . . And the annoying part is that Sir Bernard Mattheison doesn't agree, and won't certify him . . . And Dr. Studley supports Sir Bernard . . .

"Really the poor fellow was rather like those children who are only naughty, or else struck dumb, when visitors come and their mothers want to show them off . . . For when Sir Bernard came, our lunatic was as sane and normal as you are, and it appears that when he visited Sir Bernard in Harley Street, he was just the same, and only complained of nerves and insomnia, and being generally neurotic."

"Well, that's not likely to happen a second time, if the poor fellow's dotty. It'll be progressive, won't it, and he'll get steadily worse until there are none of these lucid intervals?"

"I suppose so . . . But it's going to be rather difficult meantime, and Dr. Charters can't very well call in any other doctor, immediately, in order to get the man certified . . . Not just after Sir Bernard has declared him perfectly sane, and Dr. Studley has supported him. It's

rather hard on Dr. Charters, especially when he only took him in from motives of the purest kindness."

"Why, is the chap very troublesome?"

"Troublesome! My dear, he's dangerous."

"Oh? That's bad in a place like The Monastery. Didn't they tell Sir Bernard?"

"Yes. It was rather peculiar. Dr. Charters sent for me, and there were Sir Bernard and Dr. Studley and Dr. MacAdoo talking to this Mr. Waye, the lunatic, and really it was astounding the way the man behaved—you'd have thought he was absolutely as sane as they were . . . And by the time Sir Bernard told him 'that was all, thank you,' and the consultation was over, I myself felt there was nothing for it but to declare he was sane enough then—whatever he had been before."

"How had he shown his madness before?" asked the Vicar, blowing a long cloud of smoke.

"How *hadn't* he shown it! There was my own experience—which was merely a little amusing—and Mr. James's, which was really rather terrible. And oh, a dozen other people had seen him and heard him do and say most eccentric and incredible things . . . You should hear our Miss Skinner on the subject . . . And that Mrs. Platte . . . And Colonel Campball . . . Of course he's mad."

"What was your own experience? I'm glad it was amusing rather than terrible."

"Why, I was sitting on a seat in the garden, sunning myself for a few minutes after lunch, as I generally do on a fine day, when this Mr. Waye, looking as sane as the Archbishop of Canterbury, came and seated himself beside me.

"'Good afternoon,' he said in a slightly jeering tone, 'How do you like the English climate after California?'

"'I was never in California, Mr. Waye,' I said.

"'San Francisco used to be in California,' he observed sarcastically.

"'Well, I never used to be,' I assured him.

"'Well now, isn't that strange?' he said.

"'Isn't what strange?' I asked him in some amazement, for the man was talking in the most rational manner, and one felt one had to talk sensibly.

"'Why, that they should call you "'Frisco Fanny," when you've never been in San Francisco?'"

The Vicar laughed.

"Yes, I laughed too," continued Sister Weldon. "I really couldn't help it. Fancy me as ''Frisco Fanny'!"

"Ah, that's your too golden hair, my dear," smiled the Vicar, "and your lovely colouring. To

tell you the truth, you do look more like a 'Frisco Fanny than a Sister Angela, you know. . . . With that wonderful colour-scheme, you're too good to be true."

"That's apparently what this man Waye thought, or else that I was too true to be good.

"'Who calls me "'Frisco Fanny'"? I laughed, humouring him.

"'Doesn't Half-Hung Simon?' he asked, turning upon me with an accusing glare.

"'Who's *he*?' I asked, beginning to feel a little uncomfortable, for he was so terribly in earnest.

"'Oh, you don't know him, don't you?' he sneered. 'Nor, I suppose, Gunman Gryde, nor Louie the Lady? And you don't know who Dr. MacAdoo is?'

"I assured him that I didn't . . . But he didn't believe me."

"How did it end? Has he still these delusions about you?"

"Oh, while he was referring to all sorts of weird people with strange nicknames, and to places I'd never heard of, that nice child Marjorie Lauderdell came up and asked if I couldn't bring her over to see you. She wants to talk to you. I somehow don't think she likes me very much, Laurence, but either you made a very favourable impression when you came over and

I introduced you, or else it was an excuse to get out of The Monastery."

"Any port in a storm, eh?" smiled the Vicar. "Not very complimentary, but one can quite understand a girl of that age and temperament being frightfully bored, in the circumstances. I don't see why Charters shouldn't let her come. . . . Do her good . . ."

"He wouldn't hear of it, I'm sure. Strict rule of the house . . . Well—directly my lunatic heard that I not only had a brother in the neighbourhood, but that he was actually Vicar of the parish where we'd lived all our lives, he fully and freely accepted my statement that I was not 'Frisco Fanny, apologised most humbly, and said he could not blame himself too severely for not realising, the moment he first set eyes upon me, that I was Catherine the Great who was once Queen of Naples and the well-beloved of Admiral Nelson."

A hearty peal of laughter shook the Vicar and his creaking chair.

"It's a shame to laugh," he said, "but it is really very funny . . . Catherine the Great . . . Ha, ha, ha! . . . Beloved of the gallant Horatio! Ha, ha."

"Yes," smiled his sister. "It would be funny if it weren't so terribly pathetic . . . And a little worrying . . . For he came to me a day or two later and, with every appearance

of sanity and solemnity, tried to put me on my guard."

"Against whom?"

"The Doctor, my dear! . . . Dr. Charters himself! . . . He begged and implored me to watch over Marjorie Lauderdell with the most scrupulous care, and to see that no one but myself gave her any medicine."

"Poisoning delusion," observed the Vicar. "I thought they always had these persecution-manias only about themselves."

"Yes. But that wasn't his fear at all. He's got it firmly into his head that someone's going to injure Marjorie, and he more than hinted that the Doctor is an impostor, a rogue and a criminal —an ex-convict, in fact. Also that among our nurses there are two of his accomplices known as 'Frisco Fanny and Louie the Lady. . . . Ah, and Dr. MacAdoo and Mr. James are two more villains . . . But not Dr. Studley. He's all right! . . . Isn't it too funny—or wouldn't it be, if it weren't so sad a case . . . Pathetic . . ."

"Well, the least Studley could do was to vouch for his sanity after that," the Vicar chuckled. "Poor old Charters. He has let himself in for something."

"Pretty serious though," he mused. "What was Mr. James's unpleasant experience?" '

"Well, apparently nothing more nor less than

a murderous attack. And that's what I don't understand, and what seems peculiar . . . Mr. James declares that Waye suddenly walked into his room one night, pulled out a revolver and threatened to shoot him. Mr. James, while quelling him with 'the power of the human eye,' backed to the bell and rang it. Waye then knocked him down, and when a maid answered the bell, she saw Mr. James lying on the floor, she's perfectly certain . . .

"I'm a little puzzled about this Mr. Waye—or rather about the Doctor's attitude," she continued. "But—bless me—I don't want to bring The Monastery here with me. Let's talk about something else."

"Right!" agreed the Vicar, grinning mischievously. "Does Studley show any signs of . . ."

"That will do, my lad," interrupted his sister. "Dr. Studley is part of The Monastery."

"Thank God!" she added, smiling happily.

CHAPTER VI

THE rude irruption of Mr. John Waye into the placid and peaceful current of life at The Monastery, had divers and numerous consequences; and the rippling circles that it made upon the smooth surface spread far and wide.

He "loosed an act" upon that little world, and his act inevitably led to many other acts by many other people.

First: Dr. Emmanuel MacAdoo, at the close of one of his daily conferences with his chief, observed quietly, his eyes upon the priceless Persian rug at his feet,

"We did not mention my share of the—er—fee payable by the—er—heirs of a certain charming young lady, formerly a patient of mine."

"I don't understand," replied Dr. Charters, with perfect truth.

"Oh, I think you do . . . The young lady's relatives . . . when they become heirs . . . I mean, when they inherit . . . will have various little outstanding bills to settle. Heirs always do. Tradesmen's accounts. Debts. Lawyers'

fees. Undertakers' accounts. Doctor's fees . . . In this case the fees must be fairly heavy."

"What case?"

"This case . . . The young lady's case . . ."

Dr. Emmanuel MacAdoo lowered his voice to a whisper and, with a quick shifty glance, meeting for a second the hard probing stare of Dr. Charters' cruel eyes, added,

"Marjorie Lauderdell's case . . ."

"What are you driving at, my worthy friend?" asked the Doctor. "D'you mean you aren't satisfied with our financial arrangement and want a bigger bonus or a bigger salary . . . or what?"

"Oh, I'm perfectly satisfied with my share and my salary. I am not one to go back on an agreement. Especially a 'gentleman's contract' between men of honour . . . Oh, no. I'd never do that, Charters. Never. I'm not one of that sort! . . . I give you my word of honour, I'm not . . . My word is my bond, and when I accepted your offer and terms, I . . ."

"Cut all that right out," growled Dr. Charters, "and say what's biting you . . . What's the game?"

Dr. Emmanuel MacAdoo again glanced at his partner, or employer, and again quickly looked away.

"When I accepted your offer and terms," he repeated, "I accepted them. Yes. Once and for all. And I am not one to go back on an agreement . . . But, I think that in special cases—very special cases—there might be . . . er . . . some . . ." and paused to gnaw a finger-nail.

"Some?" prompted Dr. Charters as his hand closed on the long round ruler of heavy black ebony.

"Some . . . er . . . subsidiary arrangement. Something outside the ordinary routine of work."

"What 'special' cases, as you call them, are outside the ordinary routine of work?"

"Well—this case is. This case of Marjorie Lauderdell. You know what your instructions were to me, when her guardians brought her here . . . And now you've taken the case out of my hands . . . and . . ."

"Well? What's your trouble then?"

"I want my share of the . . . er . . . fee . . ."

"What d'you mean? . . . Have *you* gone mad too? . . . Don't you get your share of all the fees?"

"Yes. All the ordinary fees—that go through the secretary's books. But this one won't—and I want my share. I should have done the work and earned the fee if you hadn't

taken the case out of my hands, and I'm ready to take the case back . . . and do the work . . . and have my fair share of the fee."

"Look here, Manoel, my lad, I'm not a very patient man, and if there's one thing I can't stand, it's a fool . . . And any man who butts-in on my business is surely a fool . . . No bigger fool on all God's little round earth, Manoel, than the man who monkeys in my affairs . . . Get me?"

"I don't want to butt-in, nor to monkey. Not for a moment. I am not one to butt-in, or to monkey in anyone else's affairs, Doctor . . . But I think this is my affair, too . . . The case was handed over to me—and then taken out of my hands before I . . ."

"Look here, Manoel, my poor fish, you aren't getting childish, are you? You aren't actually coming to me and standing on your professional dignity—as though you were Studley or that pompous old fool Bernard Matthieson—are you? . . . You know quite well why I switched the girl over to . . ."

"Yes. I do know. That's just what I'm trying to make clear. Professional etiquette and dignity be damned. I *do* know why you took my patient out of . . ."

"And the reason?" asked Dr. Charters, the look on his face and the tone of his voice clear danger-signals to the blindest and most deaf.

"Oh, *ten thousand* reasons!" answered MacAdoo meaningly, and sprang to his feet swiftly as he looked up and saw Dr. Charters' face—now anything but inscrutable.

That gentleman, his countenance a picture of astonished bewilderment struggling with rage, rose to his feet, the heavy ruler in his hand.

"*How did you know?*" he whispered. "*Who told you?*"

"Ah! You see, I was right! . . . Ten thousand . . . And I want my share," chattered Dr. MacAdoo, retreating behind the armchair and in the direction of the door.

"I only want my proper and lawful fair share. The same as with the other fees that go through the secretary's accounts . . . Or perhaps a little more—just a little more—as it is a special case, and should by rights have been left in my hands. I think it's only . . ."

"Here—sit down. I'm not going to hurt you," interrupted Dr. Charters. "Sit down, you fool . . . Now then—where d'you get this 'ten thousand' stuff."

"Oh, never mind where I got it, Doctor—that's of no interest. I'm very glad that you admit it—and I'm sure you'll agree with me that it's only fair I should have my share, since the case was put in my hands and then taken out of them again. . . . It isn't as though I'd had nothing to do with it, and knew nothing

whatever about it . . . Though, even then, some people might think that our agreement—being a 'gentleman's contract' too—would cover *everything*. Everything—whether the fee were ten guineas, in the case of a successful cure, or ten thousand in the case of an unsuccessful—er—cure. I . . ."

"Cut it out," interrupted Dr. Charters who had been eyeing his colleague with thoughtful concentration.

"Can it. Sit down—and give me the plain truth quickly," he continued. "Where d'you get this 'ten thousand' stuff? Who told you one word about this girl's case, except myself?"

"Oh, a little bird," smiled Dr. MacAdoo.

Dr. Charters again showed himself a man of praiseworthy self-control and self-restraint.

"See here," he said quietly. "You don't know me, even yet, evidently . . . But I'll mention that no man *ever* double-crossed me and got away with it . . ."

"Are you threatening me, Doctor?" interrupted Machado.

"No. Not on your life. I never threaten. Never. Make a note of it. I merely mention a fact. I am a very bad man to cross. One of the very worst—though I am afraid there is no-one, who has crossed me, whom I can give as a reference. No-one. They don't survive, Manoel . . . Get me? . . . Now, then,

answer sharp, plain, and *the truth.* Who has said a word to you about Marjorie Lauderdell ? "

And Dr. Charters, bending over his seated partner, heavily pressed him backward into the chair with the ruler, and stared into his eyes.

" Who told you about the ten thousand—reasons."

Dr. MacAdoo blinked, the pressure of the end of the ruler increased against his heart, and he tried to withdraw his eyes from the hypnotic gaze that held them.

" Do I get my share ? "

" You do."

" How much ? "

" Er—half."

" *Half ?* On your word of honour ? "

" Half. On my word of honour . . . Who told you the . . . fee . . . was ten thousand ? "

" This man Waye."

" *What !* "

" This man Waye. And he told me *to tell you* I ought to get my share . . ."

Dr. Charters sat down in his chair, passed his hand across his face, and then rested his brow upon the hand as he stared in fear and amazement at Dr. Manoel Machado.

Secondly : Marjorie Lauderdell, sitting at her window, listless, unhappy, resentful, pondered the implications of the peculiar conduct of this

strange person, Mr. Waye. For his conduct had been peculiar with regard to herself, quite apart from the amazing eccentricity of his general behaviour.

On first catching sight of her, he had looked at her in an extraordinary manner ; had called her ' Rosemary ' ; and it had seemed as though he were going to come—and kiss her ; greet her by her own name—as if he already knew her . . . Or was it as though she reminded him of somebody ?

And that second time, when she had been sitting on the seat in the garden and he had come and spoken to her. How his burning deep-set eyes had searched her face and seemed to search her thoughts and mind and soul. There had been nothing mad or eccentric about his conversation then. Nothing curious whatever, except that he had again called her ' Rosemary.'

Why hadn't she followed her impulse and instinct then, and trusted him ?

What a little fool she had been to snub him and declare that she was perfectly well and happy, and not in the least need of his help and advice nor of that of anybody else.

Of course she wasn't either well or happy ; and of course she wanted help and advice—more than anything else in the world.

And yet what else could one say or do when

a perfect stranger came and uttered mysterious warnings against taking the medicine that was prescribed for one in an excellent and famous Nursing-Home? Particularly a person who was popularly supposed to be mad, and who certainly behaved, upon occasion, in the maddest way.

But then again, her medicine did *not* agree with her . . . Not even the medicine she was having now, from Dr. Charters, although it was quite different from the stuff she had had from that beastly Dr. MacAdoo.

She did want help and advice.

That horrible James man! . . .

What she wanted, more than anything, was help to get away from the place, for there was not a soul in it that she liked or trusted. Not even the Head Sister, Nurse Weldon, though she liked her brother. Would Sister Weldon take her to see him, and would the Doctor let her go? One could talk to him—perhaps tell him everything and ask him for advice and help. But even if she could see him and talk to him, he'd only smile at her foolishness and say she must obey her guardians and the Doctor. . . .

Matron was all-right, of course, but one only saw her at meals, and now that they were keeping one upstairs so much, one hardly saw her at all . . .

. . . How foolishly she had behaved when Mr. Waye came and walked up and down on

the lawn beneath her window and looked up at her, from time to time . . . Why had she withdrawn in that childish way? . . . Like some silly schoolgirl tossing her head and flouncing off when a silly school-boy grinned at her.

If he would only come along now—she would call out to him and have a chat.

But how could two people " chat " at the tops of their voices—one standing with his head bent back until his neck nearly broke, and the other hanging over a window-sill?

Still it would be nice to see him. Only just to see him. His face was so strong and he looked so forceful and firm and reliable . . . She had been a perfectly and peculiarly ordinary garden goat not just to jump at the friendship he had tried to offer . . .

A real friend was exactly what she needed.

Suppose he went away, and she were left here alone, without a single person—whom she liked and trusted—to talk to, to consult, to confide in . . . to tell that she believed that her " illness " was actually *due* to the medicine that was being given to her . . . that she believed her letters were withheld from her, and that she did not believe that the letters she wrote and posted downstairs were ever sent out of the house.

If she did get a chance to speak to him again, and told him all this, would he laugh at her,

refuse to take her seriously, and say he could not help her—simply because there was no occasion or need for any help!

No—she did not think he would do that. He had been sane enough when he had said: "Never take any medicine here. None whatever—no matter what it is—unless Dr. Smalley gives it to you. Insist on having him as your doctor . . ."

He always looked at her so kindly, so understandingly, so meaningly . . . as though he had something he wished to say to her.

Or was she becoming a sentimental ass and imagining things about the man? Being kept here was enough to make the most sensible person sloppy and unstrung.

If only he would come along now, she would signal to him . . . And then what? Ask him to wait while she wrote a note that she would throw down to him.

She would write it now and have it ready.

"Dear Mr. Waye," wrote Marjorie Lauderdell.—

"I am very sorry that I was so rude and silly when you wished to be friendly and helpful; and as I ridiculed the idea of needing any help, I want to apologise and to say exactly the opposite. I do want help for I am getting frightened. I can't explain exactly why, but

there it is—I'm afraid. It seems too silly to put into words, but I really believe that I am not really ill at all. I believe I was deliberately *made* 'ill' at home, and am being kept 'ill,' although I refused to have anything more to do with Dr. MacAdoo and his medicine. I believe Dr. Charters' medicine is just as bad, for I have felt worse each time I've taken it—absolutely rotten—with horrid pain too. I'm going to take your advice. I shall pretend to take it, but throw it away instead of drinking it. But what shall I do if Nurse Jones or Sister Weldon stands over me, and insists on my taking it?

"I can't understand why I've had no answer from my uncle. I don't believe my letters have been posted—or else that his letters to me are stopped. Other letters too, that I know should have come in answer to mine. It sounds absurd and ridiculous I know, but I can't help thinking it. I'm perfectly certain that Uncle Will would come here at once and kick up a frightful row if he knew how I feel. He's weak, and he's under Aunt's thumb, but he is quite kind always. What is most likely is that he has had my letter in which I begged him to come and fetch me, but has also had one from Dr. Charters saying that he mustn't take any notice of my nonsense, for I'm simply being tiresome. Aunt Maud could easily persuade him that it would

be very wrong and foolish to take me out of Dr. Charters' hands. She could persuade him to anything.

"Will you please forgive my rudeness and help me if you can?

"Yours very sincerely,

"MARJORIE LAUDERDELL.

"Oh Mr. Waye, I'd give anything to get away from here. I am so frightened, and I do so loathe Nurse Jones—and that man James."

. . . . . .

Until she was ordered to bed by Sister Weldon, invoked by Nurse Jones, Marjorie sat at the window, waiting and hoping for sight of John Waye; but it was not until the following morning that, on one of her many excursions from bed to the window, she saw him strolling on the turf in the shade of an avenue of great chestnuts which, some hundred yards from her window, ran parallel with that side of the house.

Snatching her letter from its place of concealment, she waited until John Waye, turning about, glanced up at her window as he passed. Beckoning, she held the letter up, dropped it to the grass some twenty feet below her window, and watched while John Waye, hands still in the side-pockets of his coat, sauntered to the spot.

Thirdly: Sir Bernard Matthieson, who had been at Guy's with Mark Studley, improved the

occasion, as was his custom, and killed two birds with one stone, by carrying off that old friend to lunch with him at the Red Lion at Herepath.

"Do you all the good in the world, my boy. I positively insist. And you are to walk back," he said, as he bustled into Dr. Studley's consulting-room at The Monastery, after his consultation with Doctors Charters and MacAdoo.

"Well, Mark, how do you like yourself at The Monastery?" enquired Sir Bernard, as they sat down to lunch in the ancient oak-panelled dining-room of the Red Lion.

"Oh, well enough, Bernard. Very interesting work and plenty of variety, and I get enough time for reading."

"Keeping abreast, eh?"

"Yes. I don't want to stagnate. I'm hoping to come to Harley Street myself, in two or three years . . . when I've finished my *magnum opus*."

"Good luck to you, my son . . . you can count on me when the time comes . . . How do you get on with Charters?"

"Oh, well enough!"

"Don't like him much, eh?"

"Oh, I don't know . . . He's a very able chap. Absolutely marvellous diagnostician, and a fine surgeon."

"And MacAdoo? What do you make of him?"

"He's a clever chap."

"What's his speciality?"

"Tropical diseases and poisons. Real authority on South American vegetable poisons. *Wourali* and the more recondite native drugs . . . Bit of an authority on malaria and yellow fever . . . Did some good research work up the Amazon and in Luzon and the Philippines generally. The Negritos there have some wonderful drugs, and MacAdoo went after them. They have one poison for their hunting-arrows and another for their war-arrows—the first causing painless, and almost instant, death; and the other causing terrible agony, paroxysms and contortions, before certain death. No antidote whatever, for either of them."

"And MacAdoo got the secret of them, eh?" asked Sir Bernard.

"I believe so—as well as a stock of each . . . He was telling me that the hunting-poison is marvellous stuff—humane to use, quite painless in fact, and does not affect the flesh of the animal from the hunter's point of view—doesn't spoil the meat in the least . . . In fact, neither poison leaves any trace whatever in the body, he tells me, whether injected or swallowed . . . Quite volatile—although the war-arrow poison gives a contortion-convulsion re-action like

that of strychnine . . . Most interesting study . . . Yes, MacAdoo's very keen on his subject and doing some real pioneering work in vegetable poisons . . ."

"An American?"

"I don't know. He's certainly not straight from the Highlands. As a matter of fact, I think he studied at Lisbon and Rio Janeiro. Possibly Scottish extraction, and naturalised in Portugal or South America. He knows Brazil pretty thoroughly . . . By the way, he's working on an extraordinary Brazilian frog—a black and green beast—from which a tribe of Indians extract both a poison and a dye. He tells me they catch parrots, and dye them to the local fashionable colour, with this stuff, but it is as a blow-pipe poison that they use it chiefly—very deadly stuff . . . He'll make a name for himself if he publishes . . ."

"Do you like him?"

"Oh, I dunno . . . He's a queer clever chap."

Sir Bernard Matthieson smiled.

"I gather, my dear Mark, that you detest both him and Charters. . . . Had any personal contact with this man Waye—John Waye?"

"No, I don't detest them. Charters is very decent to me, and I get on all right with MacAdoo . . . Don't see very much of him . . . Yes, I've come across Waye . . . or rather

he's come across me. Rather sought me out, although he's not my patient."

"Would you say he was mad?"

"No, not from personal observation. By all accounts he says and does some astounding things. You should hear my Miss Skinner's tales about him! But he's been as sane as you or I, whenever I've seen him. I did hear that he'd committed a violent and unprovoked assault upon a man named James—sort of confidential factotum of Charters. But personally I should consider that strong evidence of complete and undoubted sanity."

Sir Bernard laughed.

"I gather that you detest Mr. James, if not his employers."

"Well—yes—I do rather dislike Mr. James. He makes my blood run cold."

"Why?"

"Oh, his general coldness, I suppose . . . Cold eye . . . cold mouth . . . cold face . . . cold manner . . . cold heart, I should say."

"Then you don't think Waye's attack on him was a case of homicidal mania?"

"Justifiable homicide, if so," smiled Dr. Studley.

"So I gather you wouldn't certify Waye if you were asked?"

"No, I wouldn't. As I say, by all accounts he has behaved in the maddest way, but on the

other hand, speaking from purely personal experience, I found him as sane as a man could possibly be."

"I quite agree. Perfectly normal reactions. No sign of diffused scelerosis or any organic lesion . . . As I told Charters, I couldn't possibly certify a man on hear-say like that. Granted he must be mad to behave as they say he has done, I've got to see him at it, before I can certify him. I've seen him three times now . . . twice here, and once at Harley Street, before he came here, and he was simply not mad on any of those occasions. I frankly laughed at him when he came to me in Harley Street and asked me if he were going mad. I told him that anyone who is going mad is the last person in the world to know it."

"On what did he base his belief?"

"Oh, he said he was constantly finding that he had done things without knowing that he'd done them . . . violent things . . . Lapses of memory too . . . Wanted to make out that he wasn't always responsible for his actions . . . Common enough symptoms with anyone who is badly run-down . . . over-work . . . over-worry . . . Some neurosis . . . I agreed with him that he couldn't do better than have an absolute rest in the depths of the country. Pure air . . . regular hours . . . diet . . . thorough change and no worry."

"Doesn't seem to have worked quite, does it?" observed Dr. Studley.

"No. The next thing I hear is that Charters wants me to come and certify him as a lunatic."

"And you refuse to do it?"

"Absolutely. I couldn't be a party to putting that man, as I find him, into the awful living death of imprisonment-for-life in a lunatic asylum . . . It's easier to get into one of those places than to get out again . . . I won't agree to it . . ."

"No . . . You said Charters wants you to certify him . . . literally 'wants,' do you mean, Bernard?"

"Well, come to think of it, both Charters and MacAdoo were decidedly keen on it, and they produced a cloud of witnesses. The excellent Sister Weldon, the Matron, a nurse—Jones, I think, was the name—and your friend Mr. James. Each with a tale of astounding eccentricities . . . Well, I'm coming down again later on, at Waye's own request, and will see how he behaves then . . . And you might keep an eye on him yourself, Mark, and let me know what your further private opinion is . . . I'd almost as soon sign an innocent man's death warrant as make a mistake over certifying a sane man."

"Right. I'll cultivate him as far as I can

without giving offence in any direction. He's Charters' own patient . . . But it's a queer business, very queer . . . I'd swear that man was as sane as I am—although by all accounts his behaviour would occasionally enliven Colney Hatch itself . . ."

"Very queer," agreed Sir Bernard.

"There's one solution, of course," observed Mark Studley. "He might be shamming."

"Good Lord! Why should he do that?"

"I dunno. Form of 'hysteria,' perhaps."

"Well, if that were so, I should say it was the maddest thing he'd done yet," replied Sir Bernard.

Fourthly: Dr. Charters and Mr. James came as near to a breach as was possible between two men of mutual interests, whose lives were so intertwined and bound together.

They sat in solemn conclave until Dr. Charters introduced the subject of John Waye, and very quickly the Doctor's fair stock of patience was out-worn by Mr. James's dull reiteration of his one specific, "bump him off"; and the simple, direct, untutored mind of Mr. James was irritated by Dr. Charters' oft repeated and vain speculation, "Who is this man Waye?" . . .

"He's got me guessing, Jimmy, all day and all night."

"Well, get him guessing," growled Mr. James, "since he's so clever."

"Guessing what?"

"How to eat enough daisy roots to keep himself happy! How to nibble his way out from a hole in the ground, six feet deep under some of those Monastery ruins. Bump him off, I say."

"I wish you could say something sensible. I've told you, till I'm tired, how he's got us fixed, and Matthieson's coming again at Waye's request . . . Not but what I'll get him in the end . . . oh, I'll *get* him . . ."

"If he doesn't get us first . . . Bump him off, I say."

"Would you mind not saying that again, but set your wits to work about him and Spider Schlitz, and find out something about him. Get busy, I say, and find out something about him. . . . Have you searched every possible place in his room? Hasn't he got *any* papers or letters? I can't do everything myself; my hands are full, and so are MacAdoo's and the girls', and all you can do is to sit there and say 'Bump him off,' when I tell you that his life's absolutely precious to us, just at present.

"*Bump him off!*" continued the Doctor with a sneer. "Suppose you do something helpful —watch him—and find out something about his game. Watch him, I say."

"Yes, you say a lot, Boss. Now suppose you give yourself a rest and listen to me."

"Well, be quick, and if you've been 'thinking' again . . ."

"*Can* it; and listen an earful," said Mr. James. "Then perhaps you'll do some thinking, too. Last night I was making my second round, and, half turning a corner, slowly, for a squint down the corridor, what should I see but someone coming along it towards me. Coming soft, too. In black socks and a dark dressing-gown. Should never have got him, but that he had to cross a window. I faded flat into the wall, with half an eye round the corner, intending to follow him up."

"Good boy, Jimmy. And where was our goddam Mysterious Mr. Waye off to? . . . You followed him of course?"

"You wait, and do some of that thinking you talk about," replied Mr. James sourly.

"Well," he continued. "I didn't follow the guy at all. Before he reaches the end of the corridor, he stops, squints like he's peekin' up at the number over a door, and for a second flashes on a torch. I got half a glimpse of his face, and who do you think it was?"

"Waye?"

"No. It wasn't. Not yet. It was that old rum-hound, Colonel Campball. And what room d'you think he'd gone into?"

The Doctor stared in amazement.

"Not Waye's?"

"You've got Waye on the brain. No, it wasn't Waye's. It was the sainted and sanctified room of that hard-boiled virgin, Miss Skinner! That's what."

"Well I'm damned!" said the Doctor. . . . "Anyhow we'll soon put an end to that sort of thing.

"We've never had a scandal in The Monastery yet and we won't start now," he added virtuously. "Colonel Campball and Miss Skinner clear out of here to-morrow, ill or well, cured or not cured."

"And the Waye guy?" sneered Mr. James.

"What's he got to do with this?" enquired the Doctor.

"Well, since you're so good at thinking, perhaps you can say," was the reply. "For I just sat me down comfortable in a recess in that corridor, waiting for that boozy old garden tom-cat to come out again and get the shock of his life, when, lo, it wasn't so. Not by a jugful. It was me who got the shock.

"For, ten minutes later, along comes another cat, treadin' soft. '*Gee!*' thinks I. '*Am* I in The Monastery, or Old Man Piggot's own holy Abode of Love?' And believe me, Boss, you could have knocked me down and up again, with the tip-end of a hummin'-bird's feather, when

this second wanderin' cat stopped at the same door, too! . . .

"This one doesn't dive straight in like a rabbit into a burrow, as the other done; he just taps the handle gentle, then opens the door and slides in. There's a light in the room now, so I get a glimpse of this one's face, too."

"Who was it?" snapped the Doctor, his usually inscrutable face expressing anger and bewilderment in no uncertain manner.

"Who was it?" growled Mr. James. "I'll tell you who it was, and then you can do some of this thinkin' you talk so much about . . . It was only your Mr. Precious Don't-Bump-Him-Off Waye. That's who it was."

Speechless, the Doctor stared his amazement and incredulity.

"Thinkin' any, Boss?" jeered Mr. James.

The Doctor put this aside with a gesture.

"Couldn't you hear anything?" he asked.

"Nope. The innocent old maid and the poor silly rum-hound and His-Life-is-Precious-to-Us Mr. Waye had plugged the key-hole, put the eider-down or something along the bottom of the door, and gone to the far side of the room to hold their meetin'—in soundless whispers. . . .

"Now you do some thinkin', Boss."

It was evident that Dr. Charters was obeying this good advice to the utmost extent of his powers.

"And while you're doing it, I'll tell you something else," continued Mr. James. "Though it's a thing I wouldn't tell ordinarily, for I'm not proud of it.

"As slow—as slow—as a dead tortoise crawlin' backwards, I turned the handle of that door, knowing that none of them have keys or bolts. Then about one-hundredth part as fast as that, I began opening the door . . .

"And d'you think there was a sound out of that room or a glimmer of light in it? Not on your life. Those three innocents had froze stiff and silent, and put the light out long before that handle had finished turning."

"Did you go in?" asked the Doctor.

"You bet I did. I allowed I'd be tickled to death to hear what that old rum-hound Campball had got to say, and see how your goddam Mr. Waye would explain himself away . . .

"He explained himself away, sure enough. Huh! . . .

"Yes, I went in all-right, all-right. I certainly then opened that door like it was broad daylight, and walked in like I was the great Dr. Charters, and said into the pitch darkness of that room,

"*'Evenin' Miss Skinner! . . . Havin' a good time?'*

"And so help me Hannah, if that wicked old

hen, bold as brass, didn't bawl me out like I was a burglar, and she was the Pastor's young daughter. You'd betcha life she'd just bin woke up from her innocent slumbers and was squawkin' from under the bed-clothes.

"'*Oh, it's a man,*' she screeched. '*Get out of here, you wicked wretch. Who are you? What d'you want? I'll rouse the house. I'll call the Doctor. Oh, where's the light and the bell?*'

"'*Right where they used to be, Marm,*' says I, reaching out my hand and switchin' on the light.

"And what d'you think I saw?

"Our Miss Skinner, squintin' out from under the bed-clothes with one eye and one nose. And not another thing in that room! . . .

"Campball and Waye? There wasn't such people. . . . Did I feel a fool?"

The Doctor murmured something.

"'*Oh, it's you, Mr. James. Good gracious, what a fright you gave me,*' says Miss Skinner. '*Oh, what on earth's the matter? Is the house on fire? . . . What is it?*'

"'*Why, I thought . . . I thought I saw a man come in here,*' I said as soon as I could get my breath.

"'*Oh!*' she squawked. '*Oh! Mr. James. Oh! look under the bed. And look in the wardrobe and the cupboard and behind the curtains.*'

"I'll say I did look.

"Two men? There wasn't two mice.

"'*Oh,*' squawks the young innocent in the bed. '*I shall never sleep comfortable in this room again.*'

"'*I believe you've said something. I don't think you will,*' says I.

"'*Well, as you've woke me up, and given me a dreadful fright for nothing, suppose you go away now, and please send Nurse Wilson to me at once.*'

"Well, nothing else for it. But it was Nurse Jones I sent to her. And all that old fairy wants is her drops or her soothing-draught or her dummy teat, or her sleepin'-mixture, or something . . ."

Dr. Charters sat staring, silent, and, if such a word were applicable to such a man, aghast.

"You sat down on a couch in that corridor and went to sleep—and had a dream, Jimmy," he said at last.

"You can cut that right out," was the reply. "It's not *me* that does the dreaming here . . ."

"Well, I hand it to them," concluded Mr. James. "The joke was on me—this time. That was the slickest and cleverest get-away ever staged on this little ole earth—and whether they were behind the door and went through the doorway before I switched the light on, or out of the window before I opened the door, I don't know, and ain't likely to. . . . No, the

laugh's on me. But, as the poet saith, he laughs best who don't laugh till he's put his bullet in the other guy's stomach. . . .

"Simple lot of heavy-handed Sunday School teachers, ain't they? Now you do some thinkin', Boss. But don't you bump Mr. Mysterious Waye off, oh no!"

And rising, Mr. James departed from the consulting-room.

Dr. Charters did some thinking. Among other things he wondered whether Mr. James were as truthful as the original Truthful James.

Fifthly: Colonel Campball and Miss Skinner received twenty-four hours' notice to quit the Monastery; and did so under indignant protest, loud expostulation, and obvious amazement.

CHAPTER VII

"WELL—this lets *us* out, all-right," opined Mr. James, as he swiftly scanned the half-column that Dr. Charters had indicated. "No guy could do such a plumb god-awful low-down thing as that . . ."

"What I said, directly I read it," agreed Dr. Charters. "And since we've given him a lie-up here, and treated him square, I don't see why he should want to squeal on *us*. 'Tisn't as though we were double-crossing him and putting him away . . . Why shouldn't he keep his mouth shut when he's giving himself up voluntarily?"

"If he does," gloomed Mr. James.

"What else could he do? It would be unspeakable enough if the other was an enemy . . . But a stranger! . . ."

Words failed the good Doctor, and he sat dumb with righteous indignation.

"Seen him yet?" enquired Mr. James.

"No. The swine's still in at breakfast . . . We'll have him in the consulting-room in a minute, and put it up to him. We'll all of us

be here, and tell him what we think of him, if he doesn't toe the line quick and clean . . . A little mass-suggestion . . . Herd psychology.'

"I dunno about mess-suggestion and heard psychology," confessed Mr. James, "but I know something about gang-discipline—and that's what he wants, the low-living louse . . . And look at here. If he won't step up sharp and own to it, and put the police wise on the other guy's innocence, we've got to do it for him . . . And if he squeals on *us*, there are plenty here to swear that one of the bats in his belfry is that everybody's a crook, and that he's got 'em all taped as old lags, con-men, yeggs, hi-jackers, gunmen and everything else . . ."

"Risky, Jimmy . . . Terribly risky . . . Suppose some wise guy in the Special Branch at Scotland Yard took him seriously, and started looking into things over on the other side . . . We'd probably get away with it all-right—but I should be mighty anxious for a bit . . . And the more we proved he was a raving lunatic, the more we should help him to cheat the gallows—and I want him dead . . ."

"Sure. But a life-jolt in a criminal lunatic-asylum would give the clever-neck something to think about."

"Yes. But I want him dead."

"Well—if he confessed, they'd hang him all-right if it were shown that Sir Bernard Matthieson refused to certify him."

"And then he's sane enough for his tale —about us and Spider Schlitz and the rest of the gang—to be worth listening to, and acting upon . . . It's a cleft stick—and he's still got us . . . Unless he's also got the common honesty to go and take his medicine without squealing. Now they've pinched an innocent man, the position's altered; and it's up to him to say to us, '*You've been good guys and I'm grateful. I am off to give myself up and take what's coming to me, with a shut mouth*' . . . Why not?"

"Guess he'll want to wait and see whether the innocent man is released . . . If they let the guy go again, all's well, and Waye lies low a bit longer—until the hue and cry dies down and somebody else gets murdered, and this affair blows over . . ."

"Wonder if the police acted on that letter they found pinned on Spider's waistcoat? . . . I call that pretty cool, to sit down alongside the stiff-'un you've just bumped off, and write a 'confession' with the full description of yourself—the murderer—with name and address complete."

"Is that what he did?" enquired Nurse Jones.

"According to the *Morning Star* account of it," replied the Doctor. "Yes, he's a cool hand all-right, all-right," he added.

"But what was the game in describing some imaginary person and giving a bogus name and address as well?" asked Dr. MacAdoo.

"Oh, dust your brains, Manoel," snapped the Doctor. "A hope's a hope, and a chance is a chance. If it put the police on to looking for a guy lying up in Glasgow or Bristol, while you're making tracks for The Monastery, it's something to the good . . . Especially if they think they recognise someone they know, in the description of the imaginary person in the letter."

"Sure thing—if it was imaginary," observed Mr. James portentously.

The other four eyed him with looks varying between bewilderment and horror.

"You don't mean to suggest he'd give the actual name of some innocent person?" said Dr. MacAdoo.

"I certainly do. And his proper name and address, too," growled Mr. James. "He's a real bad guy. . . . Bump him off, I say."

Something of consternation seemed to settle on the faces of these reformed, retired, and rehabilitated ladies and gentlemen.

"He's a goddam walking mystery, and

there's nobody I'd sooner see bumped off, if it were a little safer," said the Doctor, at length, "but we've no call to think he's as bad as that, Jimmy. He couldn't be. Nobody could do anything as bad as that . . . Why, if I thought that of him, I'd let you loose on him right now, and risk the consequences."

"Not you," growled Mr. James. "You think too much."

"Good job there's someone here to do some thinking," replied the Doctor.

"Does the paper give the whole letter with the description and the name and address?" asked the Matron.

"No; the police would see to that, and it seems to be the only paper whose reporter got wise to the fact that the murderer had had the nerve to sit down right there and concoct his little 'confession,' or else his 'eye-witness's version,' for the benefit of the police."

"Once again, and for the ten-millionth time, who on earth *is* he?" enquired Nurse Jones of the ambient unanswering air.

"Good-morning, ladies and gentlemen. Staff conference? The devoted friends-of-the-afflicted and healers-of-the-sick, in council?" said a bantering and mocking voice, as Mr.

Waye seated himself upon the low sill of the big window, and looked into the room.

"Ah, all present I see—Half-hung Simon, Gunman Gryde, Manoel Machado, 'Frisco Fanny *and* Louie the Lady."

The dangerous men and women so addressed, turned with one accord, and eyed the speaker with the cold and concentrated hostility of hate.

The Doctor was the first to recover from the surprise of this sudden appearance of the subject of their conversation.

"We were just talking about you," he said.

"I'm sure you were," replied Waye. "I am quite convinced that you talk and think about me quite a lot. So flattering."

"And I was just going to send for you," continued the Doctor.

"Now, that's a coincidence, for I was just going to send for you—the whole bunch of you . . . to receive my instructions, Simon."

The knuckles of Dr. Charters' powerful hands gleamed white, as he clenched his fists, while the right hand of Mr. James strayed beneath his jacket in the direction of his hip-pocket.

"Well, suppose you get my instructions first," suggested the Doctor, "Short and sharp . . . One word . . . *Get* . . ." and the Doctor's right hand came down with a heavy thud upon his desk. "You've had a run for

your money, and your game's up—and now you can clear out of here as quick as possible, and a damned sight quicker. We're through with you . . . So go while the going's good, and think yourself lucky you get the chance."

Uninvited, John Waye stepped into the room, as he had done on the day of his arrival at the Monastery, took an arm-chair, crossed his knees, and, leaning back, settled himself comfortably, took out his cigarette-case and smiled at the Doctor.

"And why this sudden change of front, Simon? This threatened cessation of hospitality? This attitude almost of unfriendliness?"

"Seen the paper?" snarled the Doctor.

"Oh yes. I always see the papers. I have them with my morning tea, you know . . . Drink my tea—two cups, no sugar—light a cigarette, and settle down for ten minutes' read while my bath is being got ready," and John Waye smiled round at the ring of hard cruel faces of the men and women who watched him, intent, with angry eyes.

"Look at here, you," continued the Doctor. "Suppose you cut out the funny stuff—before we do something a little against our interests . . . Since you've seen the papers, you know the game's up."

"My game or yours, Simon?"

Dr. Charters, once again obviously exercising great and commendable restraint, replied:

"Yours," and added with slight self-righteousness, "We are not 'wanted' murderers."

"You're *not*, Simon? Well now, how apt one is to misjudge people! I should have thought that was exactly that you were. And so my game is up, is it? And why do you think that?"

"Obviously. Surely? . . . We don't suppose that even you are going to lie up here, while an innocent man swings for what you did. Little as we like you, we do you that much credit."

"You flatter me, Simon."

"I hope not. I hope I don't misjudge you."

"Well, sorry as I am to seem unworthy of your good opinion, Simon; sad as I am to disappoint you—I am not going."

"Not going to give yourself up? . . . You'd lie in bed here, and let an innocent man swing for you?"

"He's not swinging yet, anyway, Simon."

"No, but he will—unless the poor devil has got a fool-proof alibi. The dicks must have pinched the first crook that answered the description in the letter you left on Spider Schlitz's body."

"A low-down goddam dirty trick," growled Mr. James indignantly.

"Sickenin' swine," murmured Nurse Jones, while the fingers of the Matron's right hand curled and curved in the manner of the claws of a cat about to scratch.

"Oh, I don't know," observed Dr. MacAdoo tolerantly. "Quite legitimate, I think, so long as he owns up—as of course he will do—now that someone else is arrested. Quite a good trick for putting the police off the scent . . ."

"Tastes differ," sneered the Doctor. "Not the sort of trick that appeals to me. Filthy . . . low . . . unspeakably foul . . ."

"I suppose you don't deny you wrote it?" he added, turning to John Waye.

"Certainly I wrote it. I wrote it all right. And what's more, Simon, I gave an actual name—the real name of a real man, here in England. Apparently the police have suppressed it . . ."

With an oath Mr. James sprang to his feet—his restraint vanquished at the bare thought of such ineffable villainy, such incredible violation of all fair and decent dealing between honourable crooks.

The Doctor himself seized Mr. James's wrist as, with a flash of blued steel, it appeared from beneath his coat.

"Sit down, you simp," he hissed, and

violently thrust Mr. James back in his chair. "*Will* you leave this to me? Who asked you to butt-in? D'you want us all to . . ."

"Have it your own way," growled Mr. James. . . . "Bump him off, and done with it, I say."

John Waye smiled at the Doctor, and nodded in complacent confirmation.

"Yes, the description, name, and probably address, of an actual man," he said shamelessly.

His hearers stared in silence, genuinely shocked—shocked to the depths of their souls.

The man was a monster. Something beyond their ken and comprehension—a super-human, or sub-human villain.

"And you actually propose to let him hang, while you look on in safety?" asked the Doctor incredulously. "A perfectly innocent man!"

John Waye blew a long slow cloud of cigarette smoke, and watched it mount up toward the carved-oak ceiling.

"I don't think perfectly innocent men often get hanged in this country," he observed conversationally.

"Well, and what sort of a time do you think he's having, lying there while they weave the noose round him?"

"Most uncomfortable, I should think."

"Well then, don't you think it's up to

you? . . . Aren't you going to do something?"

"Not a thing . . . What would you do in my place, Doctor?"

The Doctor picked up his heavy ebony ruler in both hands, and that it neither bent nor broke, seemed incredible.

"Look, here," he said in a low and menacing voice, as he pointed it straight at the face of John Waye. "I'll tell you what I'd do, and I'll tell you what you're going to do, unless you're lower than a snake's belly . . . What you *are* going to do, in any case.

"For some reason of your own, you bumped off Spider Schlitz; and when you'd done it, you wrote a note for the police, to put them on the track of another man; and the police, saying the usual thing—that they'd got a clue and hoped to make an arrest at an early date—framed the man whom you described and named . . . Sort of thing they would do . . . Now then, why can't you be white enough to say '*The game's up. I've had a run for my money, and this is where I get off*'? . . . You've had a square deal here; now give this other guy a square deal—and us as well. Go to the police and take your medicine like a man, and don't squeal about *us*. We've treated you square . . . Now go and give yourself up, and take what's coming to you with your mouth shut."

"That's what you'd do, eh, Simon?"

"Certainly."

"And what about the case of poor young Swipe Gorman—eh, Simon? Young Gorman who went innocent to 'the chair'—for a murder you planned and Gunman Gryde committed. Who put Snip Casey 'on the spot', for Gryde to shoot, and then sat quiet and saw poor innocent young Gormon electrocuted for it?"

The Doctor sprang to his feet with an oath.

"*You . . . !*"

"Sit down, Simon. Sit down," soothed John Waye coolly.

The Doctor did so, his face less inscrutable than usual. He licked his lips, and appeared to swallow something.

"No." John Waye glanced at each member of his audience in turn. "No," he said. "I shan't give myself up . . . Not if they return a true bill . . . Not if judge and jury find him guilty . . . Not if he gets the death sentence . . .

"No, nor yet on the third Sunday morning after his sentence—nor at five minutes to eight on the happy morn," he continued. "Let him swing. *I hope he does swing—and then I shall be all-right* . . . See, Simon? The day he swings, I'll start packing up, and then I'll go on my way rejoicing."

"My God!" Mr. James ejaculated, aghast, and further words failed him.

"No, I shan't give myself up," repeated John Waye; "*but*," he added, smiling round, "I would not force any of *your* tender consciences. Far be it from me to do that! If I can let an innocent man hang, and you can't, why—*you must give me up*. You mustn't be a party to such wickedness. You must be guided by your better natures, your higher selves. You, Simon; you, Gryde; you, Manoel; you, Fanny; you, Louie; you must each follow the counsel of your heart; yes, for is it not written, 'Let the counsel of thine own heart stand, for there is no man truer unto thee than it'? Purge your tender consciences, you scrupulous ones. Give me up to the police, and each of you be white enough to say, '*The game's up, I've had a run for my money, and this is where I get off*' . . . eh?"

"Not that you would get off, in another manner of speaking, Simon, when I'd said my little say about one or two small matters, and then about one or two dozen more—in both England and America, Simon. You'd swing, Dr. Theodore Charters—and you know what that feels like, Simon.

"And what about you, Mr. James?" he continued, turning to that gentleman.

"Me? Self-defence! . . ."

"Ah! Self-defence . . . Guiseppe Fratelli for example?"

"He was heeled . . . He got another gun to his hand, under the counter," cried Mr. James.

"And his back was turned to you. He turned from the counter to get what you ordered, and you bravely shot him in the back."

"The man . . ." blustered Mr. James.

"Yes. And the woman? The woman who ran screaming from the inner room? There you were brave, Gryde. You faced her like a man, or rather a gunman, and shot her in the chest and face."

"The woman would . . ." began the gunman.

"Yes, and the child? The child that came after her? You shot that child of seven—in self-defence too? . . . Children are rather a speciality of yours, aren't they, Gryde?"

John Waye drew his handkerchief and wiped his lips as though he felt they might be flecked with foam, and as his blazing eyes fiercely searched the livid face of Mr. James, he added softly, "No, you won't get off, Gunman Gryde . . .

"And you, my dear Manoel . . . Accessories—before and after—fare badly in this country. And then there's extradition, Manoel. That insurance racket was a rather nasty business at Santos, wasn't it? All obviously poisoned—and with the same unknown drug, eh? And

some bad side-slips in Bahia, with the police talking of poison again . . . not to mention some little games in Chicago. I think you get 'life,' Manoel, if you don't get death.

"And Matron? What would they give our Matron when they knew she was Mother Superior of 'The Convent' of unsavoury memory? . . . When they found out that our Matron was 'Frisco Fanny herself, and heard some tales I could prove, about 'The Ship,' 'The Tavern,' and 'The Stockade,' eh?"

The Matron's pleasant face turned to a mask of evil and ferocity.

"D'ye think ye'll live to get safe on to that scaffold?" she asked.

"And Nurse Jones? Why, there'll be a positive scramble for her, when they know she's Louie the Lady who worked on the outside, in her quiet nurse's uniform, and brought more nuns to Fanny's 'convent' than any ten of the men put together . . . And you an English girl and a properly trained nurse! . . . Why, Louie, I don't believe the police themselves would be able to hold you safe—when Helen Nornafeldt's father knew where you were. I know he . . ."

"Say, Boss," interrupted Nurse Jones, turning to the Doctor. "This gink's certainly got to fall sick."

Then suddenly springing to her feet, she

darted a hand, like a serpent striking, towards John Waye's face.

"Shoot him right now, Jimmy," she cried.

"Silly girl! Silly impulsive girl!" chided Waye. "Sheer suicide, Louie. Murder's all right, but you mustn't commit suicide . . . No, your one hope is to take the greatest care of me, and keep me in a good humour, too . . ."

"Well, Doctor? Are you going to give me up?" he continued, turning contemptuously from the woman to Dr. Charters. "No? . . . No. And I shan't give myself up."

"And the innocent man?" again queried the Doctor in a curiously quiet voice, and with no sign of the righteous indignation which had recently so shaken him.

"He'll swing."

Silence fell.

"Ring the bell, Gryde," said John Waye.

"What for?"

"Because I tell you to. Ring that bell and ring it at once."

Mr. James did so.

"When the maid, or your secretary, or whoever it is, comes, tell her you want Dr. Studley," he continued, turning to Charters.

"I don't want him," was the reply.

"No, but I do—and I'll deal with him when he comes."

"Look here, my clever friend, is this house yours or mine, blight your soul? . . ." blustered the Doctor.

"Mine, practically," was the reply.

The door opened, and the Doctor's secretary entered.

"Did you ring for me, Sir?" asked the girl.

"Yes," volunteered John Waye. "The Doctor did. He wants to speak to Dr. Studley."

Unsurprised by any strange words or deeds of this eccentric man, the secretary looked at her employer, who nodded in confirmation.

"Kindly ask Dr. Studley if he'd be good enough to step this way, if he has a minute to spare," said Dr. Charters quietly.

The pale girl retired, softly closing both heavy doors.

Mr. John Waye broke the tense silence.

"So, on the whole, Doctor, perhaps you'll all decide to be deaf (for once) to the voice of conscience," he observed in a conversational bantering tone. "Fail for once in your duty as good citizens, eh? Leave the wicked to flourish here in peace like the green bay tree? Not even the picture, constantly present in your sympathetic thoughts—of an innocent man, languishing in gyves and fetters, will move you from your intention of leaving ill alone, and letting lying dogs sleep eh? . . .

"For you are a lying dog, Doctor," continued Mr. Waye pleasantly, "a thieving lying hound. And you, Manoel, are another, a smaller, meaner, more cowardly hound. And as for our Mr. James . . . since, the more I see of men, the better I like dogs, I think we'll call him a hyena. A foul, slinking, stinking, obscene and cowardly hyena, and . . ."

Nurse Jones sprang to her feet.

"Say, do you three call yourselves *men*—to sit there and let that goddam hi-jacker . . ."

There was a knock at the inner door, and instant silence fell as it opened and Dr. Studley entered.

"You sent for me, Chief?" he said, glancing round.

"Yes, Studley. Sorry to interrupt your work . . . Our wayward and eccentric humourist, here, won't be happy until you have joined the circle upon which he has intruded . . . We shall have the whole staff here in a minute. Now, Mr. Waye, we are busy people."

"Good-morning, Dr. Studley," said John Waye. "I'm awfully obliged to you, and do sincerely apologise for causing you this trouble. What I wanted to ask you, here and now, is whether you consider me to be insane in the ordinary lay sense of the word?"

Dr. Studley glanced at the expressionless face of Dr. Charters. Since the Chief had sent

for him, without other message, presumably it was his intention that this queer amusing chap should be given a straightforward answer.

"Most certainly not," he replied.

"Would you say I was insane in the technical sense of being of abnormal and unhealthy mind?"

"I would not," was the immediate reply. "I personally have seen no single symptom of it. Quite the contrary."

"Thank you, Doctor. Two more questions if you'll excuse this catechism. Do you regard me as a perfectly healthy man, physically speaking. Sound in wind and limb—one whom you'd recommend as a first-class 'life,' to any Insurance Company?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Dr. Studley, "though I'd just run the tape over you, before I signed the document," he smiled.

"And last but not least, Doctor, would it surprise you if I died suddenly . . . were *found dead in my bed* here, one morning?"

"Surprise me?" replied Dr. Studley. "You're joking . . ." and he laughed. "I'll absolutely guarantee you against that, my dear Sir, if you are nervous about yourself. And so, I'm perfectly certain, will Dr. Charters and Dr. MacAdoo . . . I'd like to be sure that I'd live to reach the age that you will."

"Thank you so much, Doctor. You reassure

me completely . . . Do you know, I'd actually got into my head that I might be *found dead* here, one morning. Silly of me, wasn't it?" and John Waye smiled pleasantly at Mr. James and Dr. Charters.

"Thank you so much, Dr. Studley," he added. "I value your opinion enormously, and I feel perfectly certain, now, that I shan't die in my sleep, or be taken suddenly ill and die here," and Mr. Waye lit another cigarette.

"That's all, Studley, thanks," said Dr. Charters, and winked heavily to his colleague, as one sane man who conveys to another, acknowledgment of their mutual appreciation of a difficult situation—such as that created by a lunatic, for example.

Decidedly puzzled, Dr. Studley retired.

"No, Simon," observed John Waye as the outer door was shut. "I don't think I shall be found dead here, and I don't think I shall disappear completely—to the astonished bewilderment of my Solicitor and Banker, not to mention Sir Bernard Matthieson—and I don't somehow fancy you'll denounce me and give me up to justice.

"And now, I think," he added, rising to his feet, "the friends-of-the-afflicted and the healers-of-the-sick might proceed about their works of mercy."

"Look here, my clever friend," said the

Doctor, his voice quiet, low, and menacing, "supposing, just supposing, that, on the one hand, your health remains good here and, on the other hand, the police don't tear you from us, exactly how long do you propose to give us the pleasure of your company?"

"Well now, let me see," considered Mr. Waye. "I couldn't really fix a date, I'm afraid. No, I couldn't tell you anything definite and accurate beyond this—I shall most certainly be with you, my dear Doctor, until this poor fellow is hanged for the murder of Mr. Theophilus Webb of Witherby End . . . And now that the police have got him, I feel quite certain that he will be hanged, for I don't mind telling you, I left some evidence on the spot, evidence confirmatory of what I wrote, and most incriminating . . . Yes. I shall certainly be with you until he's hanged."

And with a nod and a smile, Mr. Waye, stepping over the low window-sill, strolled away into the grounds, in search of Marjorie Lauderdell, whom he had begged to meet him in "the Ruins," the beautiful remains of the ancient Abbey Church, once the chapel of the Monastery.

§ 2

Dr. Charters and the confidential members of his competent staff looked at each other in a discomfort bordering upon consternation.

"And phwat d'ye know about that?" enquired the Matron.

"Looks to me like he gets away with it," answered Nurse Jones.

"So long as he gets away from here . . ." said Dr. Charters.

"But did you *ever*, in all your young lives, *ever* hear of such wickedness . . . I hand it to him for the low-downest skunk that . . ."

"Bump him off, I say," interrupted Mr. James.

"Your observations are apt to be monotonous, Jimmy," continued the Doctor wearily, "and there are occasions when the administration of your one and only panacea is not indicated. Do you suppose that man will remain—er, unbumped—for one minute after circumstances render him—er—bumpable? Be patient my boy, and you shall get him."

"If you don't wait till he gets us," grumbled Mr. James.

"Well, you leave it to me. He can't, and won't, do a thing until this other guy is hanged, or the whole affair blows over and is forgotten. Then he'll want to make his get-away . . . And when that time comes, perhaps we'll start something. Something bad for the health of Mr. Mysterious Waye."

"We certainly don't want him to come visit-

ing here again," observed Dr. MacAdoo. "If he were taken ill here, later on, and stayed with us for good—under the old yew tree —we'd feel safer."

"True enough," agreed Dr. Charters. "And very nice. But I'd feel safer still, if he left us, having said good-bye to his Solicitor and Banker and Sir Bernard Matthieson—all merry and bright and fair and friendly . . . and Jimmy *followed* him."

The Doctor gazed reflectively at the blotting-pad that he tapped with his pencil.

"Well," he said, rising, "that's that, for the present," and with a complete change of voice and manner, added, "let us now resume our interrupted professional duties, my dear colleagues."

As the Doctor's dear colleagues departed, he called one of them back.

"Er—one moment, MacAdoo," he said. "I want a word with you about one of the patients —that Miss Lauderdell."

Closing the doors, Dr. MacAdoo returned and seated himself opposite to his chief.

"Yes," he said softly. "The poor girl getting worse, Doctor?"

Dr. Charters eyed his dear colleague long and thoughtfully, with a probing and searching scrutiny, beneath which MacAdoo grew obviously uncomfortable.

"Getting worse, Doctor?" he said again, suggestively.

"No," replied Dr. Charters.

"Not getting worse?"

"No. Better."

"Getting better?"

"Steadily improving. Quickly getting better . . . and better."

Dr. MacAdoo smiled, as one to whom a nod is as good as a wink.

"Ah! You want my help, eh, Doctor? . . . One of my private, particular, and peculiar 'drugs,' eh?"

"No. I think not, thank you, my dear Manoel. I fancy I can cure my patient myself, without any help whatsoever . . . In fact, as I tell you, under my treatment, she is making enormous strides."

"Getting better?" asked Dr. MacAdoo in some bewilderment.

"Fast. And she's going to get well."

"Going to get *well*?"

"Sure. So make no mistake about it."

"Why this change in your plans, Doctor? I mean in the medical history—the, er, the future medical history—of this case?"

"Too risky," was the curt reply. "Obviously too risky . . . simply because this man Waye knows as much about it as we do, and hasn't shown his hand. He goes to you with

hints, and shows that he actually knows the price, but he hasn't come to me *with any talk of a rake-off for himself* . . . I don't like it, I tell you. He's got me guessing, and I'm worried," and again the Doctor sat tapping his blotting-paper in deep and anxious thought.

"Anyway," he continued, "this Lauderdell business is off . . . washed right out, and the girl's going to get better."

"And you're going to let ten thousand pounds slip?"

"I am," replied the Doctor with decision, rising to intimate the conclusion of the interview.

"And you're going to lose that wonderful half-share we joked about," he added. "Nothing whatever is going to happen to Marjorie Lauderdell . . ."

"Not just yet . . . Not while Mr. Remarkably Mysterious Waye is in the house," he continued—after both doors had closed behind the bewildered and distrustful Dr. MacAdoo.

CHAPTER VIII

HIS duties for the day accomplished, Mr. James, a scowl upon his brow, and the corners of his slit-like mouth down-drawn, slouched, without knocking at the door, into Dr. MacAdoo's sitting-room, and without salutation, flung himself down in that gentleman's arm-chair.

Like most other people, Dr. MacAdoo was curiously uncomfortable when alone with Mr. James.

"Something troubling you, Jimmy?" he enquired nervously, breaking the sour silence.

"Anything troubling me? Huh! There'll be something troubling the lot of us before long—and that's the police. Troubling us good and plenty, unless the Old Man watches out. I don't know what's biting him. . . . Why in blazes can't he tell this goddam Waye guy where he gets off? Why doesn't he either do him in or kick him out?"

"We-ll, he's given us plenty of good reasons for doing neither, hasn't he?" urged Dr. MacAdoo.

"Yeah. A whole heap too many . . . and it's not like him to take any guy's bluff. I don't get him at all. He's got me guessing.

"Seems to me the Boss is weakening," he added thoughtfully, as deftly he rolled a cigarette with his left hand, taking loose tobacco and cigarette-paper from a waistcoat pocket, while his right hand remained concealed behind his back, a favourite attitude with Mr. James —and one which always troubled Dr. MacAdoo, whose left hand liked to know what Mr. James's right hand was doing.

"I'll say the Boss *is* weakening, Jimmy" . . . he agreed, "and I'll tell you another thing. As you say, he gave us a wonderful lot of reasons for taking Mr. Crooked Waye to our bosoms and keeping him there. But did he slip us the real reason among them? Has he given us the inside dope on it? I wouldn't say such a thing in words, Jimmy; but I guess the Boss knows more about Mr. Downward Waye than he tells us.

"Don't you say I said so, Jimmy," he added hastily. "I wouldn't say it to anybody else; but I've come to the conclusion that the Boss is doing two things. He's playing his own game and he's weakening too."

The cold and fish-like eyes of Mr. James bored into the brown and liquid long-lashed orbs of Dr. MacAdoo.

"How come?" he growled.

"Well, it's clear enough to me, and I think it is to you—and to Fanny and Louie, that this Waye guy has got the bulge on the Boss and that the Boss is . . . I won't say double-crossing us . . . but not telling us everything. And I'll say he's weakening too. For he's said it himself over this Lauderdell business."

"What's that?" asked Mr. James.

"You know. Marjorie Lauderdell, the pretty girl in number twenty-five."

"Sure. I know the girl all-right, all-right. What's her complaint?"

"A hundred thousand pounds."

Mr. James sat upright. If his eyes did not brighten, they hardened a little, and opened considerably.

"Suffering from half-a-million bucks! What's the cure?"

Dr. MacAdoo laughed uneasily—and unpleasantly.

"I know there's arsenic in the prescription," he observed, as he looked down and polished a finger-nail.

"High fee for complete cure?"

"Ten thousand."

"Dollars?"

"Pounds sterling."

"Who scoops?"

"The Boss."

"How come that you know this, and I don't?"

"Ah!" smiled Dr. MacAdoo malevolently, "that's what I'm telling you. The Doctor is . . . I don't say double-crossing us, mind you . . . but playing his own private hand, nowadays. He wasn't going to let us in on it, at all. He was going . . ."

"Who did tell you, if the Boss didn't?" interrupted Mr. James.

"Who d'you think?"

"I'm not thinking, curse you, I'm asking. Who told you?"

"The stranger within our gates, my dear Jimmy," said Dr. MacAdoo with nervous jauntiness.

Mr. James sprang to his feet, and the Doctor flinched.

"What!" he shouted. "That eternal Waye guy? *He* told you?"

"He did . . . And now what do you know about the Boss—er—I don't say double-crossing us . . .?

"I went straight to the Boss and tackled him about it," continued Dr. MacAdoo with a ring of righteous indignation in his voice.

Mr. James emerged, still gasping, from the depths of profound amazement, bewilderment and thought.

"What did the Old Man do when you showed your hand and called his bluff?"

"Promised to go fifty-fifty with me," boasted Dr. MacAdoo proudly.

"Gee!" sneered Mr. James. "He's certainly weakening."

"Weakening! I'll tell the world. What did I say just now? . . . You've surely said it. Weakening? He's weakening so much that he's throwing up the case," chattered Dr. MacAdoo.

Mr. James stared in silence, waiting for more.

"He sent for me on purpose to tell me that he's actually giving away the ten thousand jimmy-o'-goblins—and five thousand of 'em mine at that."

"So?" mused Mr. James.

"Give any reason?" he enquired.

"He's rattled. This cursed Waye has . . ."

"Hell!" interrupted Mr. James suddenly. "Where in the name of ten million devils does Waye come into it? Where does *he* connect up with Marjorie Lauderdell?"

"Search me," sighed the Doctor. "But I guess you know now what I mean when I say the Boss is double-crossing *and* losing his nerve."

§ 2

Dr. Charters, next morning, head on hand, with pursed lips and coldly speculative eye, sat and thoughtfully considered the face of Mr. James, who, having made his moan and purged his bosom of complaint, also sat—and

started at his partner and chief, with his usual expressionless expression of sour and resentful, contemptuous and menacing, animosity.

"Now, look here, Jimmy," said the Doctor with the voice of sweet reasonableness. "Who's running this show, you or I? Whose are the brains of this little business? What do you want to butt-in on my department for? How have we made the real fine success that we have of this business—safe, paying, solid, unquestioned and respectable? By brains and teamwork. I've found the brains and got the right team together—Manoel, Fanny, Louie and you. All splendid in their job. And Studley, Sister Weldon, the nurses and the rest, all the genuine, gilt-edged, hall-marked article. . . .

"Now we can only carry on by perfect teamwork and perfect mutual trust and confidence, honesty, and straightforwardness. I . . ."

"Just what I'm complaining of," interrupted Mr. James. "Where's the trust and confidence, honesty and straightforwardness about this Lauderdell business? Where's the honesty in trying to make ten thousand pounds on the side? Looks more like a low swindle, if you ask me. *Perfect mutual trust!*" and Mr. James appeared to be about to spit.

"Aren't we on a plain business basis?" he continued. "With everything in the pool and an agreed proportional share-out of the

profits as we all signed and accepted . . . *Honesty and straightforwardness!* And when Manoel gets wise to your little game, you call it off—or pretend to! Pah! You make me feel sick in my stomach."

"Now look here, Jimmy," replied the Doctor, still speaking patiently. "Do you know why all crook-syndicates, except our own, crash, sooner or later? . . . Because crooks don't trust each other. . . . They quarrel sooner or later—and a house divided against itself cannot stand . . . Not even Monastery House. . . .

"Why do the police gangs always beat the crook gangs in the long run? Because they're united, and union is strength. . . . Who is it puts crooks in gaol? The cops? No, their brother crooks. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, where there's a plot, there's an informer, and where there's a crook gang, there's a weakling, or a grumbler, or a clever-neck who knows better than the leader . . ."

"Or a dirty double-crosser," interrupted Mr. James, with an angry and ugly sneer.

"Quite so. Now unless we want to go the way of most such—er—syndicates, we must have faith . . ."

"Hope and charity," put in Mr. James. "What a hope—and I'm to show the charity, I suppose?"

"Faith, I was going to say," continued the

Doctor with remarkable restraint, " faith, trust, unity and . . . discipline."

" Quite so," mocked Mr. James. " Quite so, as you remarked. And what's the bearing of all this on the Lauderdell business? Spill the story."

" I will—to show you you're being something of a snarling cur, and because we can't afford to have these dangerous—er—suspicions, that may lead to quarrels and all sorts of ruin . . .

" An old friend of mine, Maudie Lauderdell nowadays—absolutely on the square, white all through, and straight as a die . . . and who knows a lot about me . . . in fact I worked with her once upon a time—saw a clear chance of big money, easy as falling off a log, and came to me as the right man . . . trustworthy, discreet, sagacious and with the ideal facilities for the job. I fell for it at once . . . an absolutely safe job, fool-proof and water-tight. Now does it occur to your bright brain, or does it not, that this nice safe ten thousand pound job was all the safer and nicer for the fact that not a soul in the world could possibly know that it *was* a job? . . . The idea had come into Maud's brain, and Maud had got it over to mine with a nod and a wink to a horse that's never been blind. Why, she didn't even mention the fee in words . . .

" Do you see any good and sufficient reason

why I should shout about it to MacAdoo and Fanny, and Louie and you? . . . Of course, I trust each one of you as I trust myself, but if six people know a thing there's just exactly three times as much chance of an accident as there is if only two know it. I don't know if you're much of a mathematician, but the addition of four is multiplication by three, in this case. If walls have ears, what's the good of talking about a business like that, eh?

"As I say, I trust you all, of course," continued the Doctor, eloquently and plausibly, "but even where one hasn't to guard against treachery, one has to guard against carelessness . . . Not that I suggest for one moment that any member of our splendid team would ever be careless in an important matter, but accidents happen even in the best regulated families . . . Accidents may happen to any of us . . . A remark overheard—and then two and two put together and made into five by some clever-neck of a nosey-parker, and then the fat's in the fire . . . No—least said soonest mended, and the fewer who know, the fewer there are to say it."

The face of Mr. James retained its unpleasant expression, and his sceptical silence gave no consent to the Doctor's platitudes.

"And," continued Dr. Charters, "might I now ask how you know—how you dare and pre-

sume to think you know—that the ten thousand wasn't going into the pool?"

"Oh?" sneered Mr. James. "Oh? Then how was five thousand of it going into Manoel's pouch, as soon as he got wise to the game and put the screw on you? . . . 'All going into the pool!' . . . Like hell it was."

"Ho! Ho! So you've been talking to Manoel, and, after that, you've been thinking again. But you aren't here to think, for thinking isn't your strong point, Jimmy."

"Oh, cut it out," growled Mr. James. "Can the funny stuff and answer a plain question. Where did I come in, if Manoel was to go fifty-fifty, because he caught you out?"

"Oh dust your brains, Jimmy. *You* know what Manoel is. Do you want to sit there and tell me you think I'd *reward* that dirty dago for butting-in on me? Reward him with five thousand pounds? Like hell I would."

"You stopped his mouth, eh?" enquired Mr. James. "Put him off with a promise that you'd shut his mouth with a wad of twenty-five thousand dollars, eh?"

"You've said it, Jimmy," smiled the Doctor.

"So? And where does all this lovely trust and faith, and fair-play and honesty and straightforwardness come in, then? . . . *We* got to provide it all, while you play us for a lot of suckers?"

"Jimmy, Jimmy, you make me tired. Once again, who's running this outfit, you or I? If Manoel's fool enough to butt-in on my game . . . our game . . . aren't I free to put him off how I like? To answer a fool according to his folly? What's biting you? You don't want to start something right now, just when I'm at my wits' end over this infernal Waye guy. That man'll succeed in breaking this firm up, if we aren't careful—especially with you helping him all you know, by playing his game of sowing suspicion and distrust among . . ."

"Playing his game!" exclaimed Mr. James indignantly. "Playing Hell! . . . I'd cut his liver out . . . I'd bump the top-lofty swine off, this very night . . . Playing his game! What about you playing his game by letting him come here, letting him threaten us, fool us, rob us, and get away with it . . .

"But you come back to the point," he continued. "You don't pull wool over my eyes like that . . . Say now, suppose all that bunk—about meaning to play square, and pool that ten thousand—is the goods, why is it all off? Why must you cut it right out because this guy Waye put Manoel wise? . . ."

"Did I say you make me tired?" interrupted the Doctor. "You make me dead. Did I say thinking's not your strong suit?

My poor sap, your head's solid bone . . . pure ivory. From the neck up you're as dead as you make me feel . . . Can't you see that that's the most worrying, disturbing, and frightening thing in the whole world for us ? "

The Doctor, with outstretched minatory finger, pointed at the face of his young colleague.

" Get this, James. For Heaven's sake, get this. Get it clear. And then try to realise what it means. Waye never in his life set eyes on Maud, nor Maud on him. Not a living human being except her and me had the glimmering of an idea of this Lauderdell scheme. It only existed in her brain and mine . . . And what follows, my lad ? What follows, my clever young friend ? Mr. Blooming Mysterious Waye drops in on Mr. Dirty Dago Manoel, and not only tells him the whole plot, but *actually mentions the exact sum of money that I'm to get ! . . .* "

The Doctor threw himself back in his chair.

" Can you beat it ? " he asked. " And then you come bleating to me about shares and pools and why do I want to cut it out.

" God bless my sinful soul," he concluded explosively, " I begin to think the man's one of the Big Five from Scotland Yard—or else the Archangel Gabriel."

" Bump him off, I say," growled Mr. James.

" Did I mention that you make me just a

little tired, James? It would do us a lot of good, wouldn't it, if a god's-own-number-one top-sergeant detective from Scotland Yard disappeared here, wouldn't it? Better for us if it was the Archangel. Less likely to be missed."

"I'd bump him off," repeated Mr. James, the tenacity of whose mind was wont to exceed its brilliance.

The Doctor sighed.

"Put me wise on the whole story anyway," continued Mr. James, "since—thanks to the Waye guy—we've prised this much out of you . . . What's the Maud female get, that she can slip you fifty thousand dollars on the side, eh? Put up some of this faith and trust and straightforwardness stuff."

"Why not? The story seems to be shouted all over the place, and seemingly Waye can tell it you, any time. . . . Well—Maud butts-in to a Monte Carlo rodeo and ropes a steer called Lauderdell. Not much to him except that he's going to be Sir Something Lauderdell pretty soon, when the old guy dies—and *he's* about a hundred years old. Maud's sick of the racket and wants to retire in the odour of sanctity among the Upper Ten, and that's the London Four Hundred. But there's not more money than will keep up the old Tudor place. Then what does Maud find?

"Lauderdell's brother has died and left

Lauderdell this girl Marjorie for keeps, and a nice wad—a hundred thousand pounds—that he picked up in South Africa or Australia or the backyard of Hell, I don't know. Marjorie can't touch this until she comes of age. If she dies before she's twenty-one, Brother Lauderdell scoops it."

"And if she marries?" enquired Mr. James.

"Nix till she's of age," replied the Doctor.

"What a wicked will," observed Mr. James indignantly. "Didn't the guy want the poor girl to live to be twenty-one?"

Dr. Charters smiled.

"Well you see, he trusted Brother Lauderdell . . . and rightly. You couldn't buy him with a million, although he's a silly boozy rumhound and right under Maudie's thumb. There isn't enough money in the world to make him hurt a hair of the girl's head."

"Not so, Maudie," murmured Mr. James.

"You've said it. Soon as Maud gets wise to the situation, she thinks of me, and comes to see me at Harley Street. She's worried about her husband's niece, who lives with them . . . quite a daughter to her. Such a lovely girl . . . So young, so rich—if she lives to be twenty-one—quite sad to see her health failing like this.

"And mind you, Maud might have said it all to Sir Bernard Matthieson like she said it

to me. Not that anybody ever overheard anything said to me in my consulting-room at Harley Street.

"Well, as Maud describes the symptoms to me, the illness sounds like recurring attacks of—arsenic. And so they are.

"I tell Maud she'd better bring the girl to my Nursing-Home as there is a physician on my staff who's a specialist at this kind of rather rare illness. Maud and Lauderdell bring her and I put her in Manoel's care for *special* treatment. She's to be the one case we lose, after long and devoted care. That's all Manoel knows—that she's to get a quite complete and final cure for all her aches and pains and troubles . . . as I've just told you. I saw no sense in broadcasting the business until it was finished and Maud had cashed in. Time enough then to divide up.

"Second or third time Maud and Lauderdell come to see their darling, Maudie reminds me how anxious and worried they are, and how dreadful it would be if the poor child died within a few weeks of her birthday when she would come into a hundred thousand pounds—and I tell you, Jimmy, we talked as innocently and carefully as though all the press-reporters from London were in the room."

"Anyhow she offered you ten thousand pounds in plain English, I suppose?"

"You ought to cut out supposing, Jimmy, you aren't good at it. You're a great little man to carry out orders, but . . .

"No, she didn't offer me ten thousand pounds in plain English. She sat in that chair and talked pretty and we understood each other to a hair's breadth, and nothing said that all Scotland Yard mightn't have listened to. Then she took out her little engagement-book and wrote the sum in figures. She passed it to me, and, with a glance and a nod, Maud and I had made a solid brass-bound contract—better than any that was ever witnessed by ten attorneys, because Maud and I know and trust each other, and our word to each other is ten times as good as our bond. We . . ."

"Yeah, very interesting," sneered Mr. James.

"And what did you do with the piece of paper?"

"I chucked it in the waste-paper basket. No need for 'a scrap of paper' between me and Maud."

"You chucked it in the waste-paper basket. Yes. And, you blasted fool, that's how Waye got the . . ."

"Thinking again are you, Jimmy? Being brilliant again?" interrupted the Doctor. "Suppose . . . just suppose . . . that Waye raked over the dust-bin next day; or walked into this room in the middle of the night and

searched my waste-paper basket—if he were in the house at all, at that time—what would a little piece of paper with five figures on it tell him, eh, my clever Jimmy? . . . Say, look here now, as it happens I've got an actual deal with a certain person over a certain matter involving a certain sum of money . . ."

The Doctor wrote some figures on a scribbling-block and passed it to Mr. James.

"There you are, Jimmy. That's the precise amount, seven hundred and fifty pounds. Now, my clever young thinker, tell me all about that deal, and name the person, and describe the whole matter, will you, just from seeing those figures, a seven, a five and a nought. Can you? . . . Of course you can't. . . . Not to save your life could you produce the vaguest idea as to what it refers to. . . . Nor could Waye—either with regard to that seven-fifty or with regard to the ten thousand, even if he ever saw it . . . which he never did . . . And who's the silly fool now, my clever James, you or I?"

Mr. James shelved that question.

"Then how did he get to know?" he asked.

"You tell *me* that, and you shall have the whole ten thousand for yourself, Jimmy."

"But I thought you're quitting—giving the whole thing up?" expostulated Mr. James.

"I am. I am not a brainless fool. It's far

too dangerous while Waye is here—and she'll be twenty-one—or thirty-one—before he skins out, damn him. No, I'm not going to lose out *now*—now that I've made good . . . and safe . . . at last. No! Not for ten thousand pounds—nor for a million either. I'm never going back to the crook-life, Jimmy—now I'm out of it and safe."

"You're losing your nerve."

"Better than losing my life. I've had a rope round my neck once, Jimmy . . . Now you want to quit thinking and being clever. All the cleverness you need is to be clever enough to leave all that to me. I've put you in clover and on velvet here, my lad—so stay put."

"But if the girl goes back to Maud, that dame'll bump her off all the same, and we lose the rake-off," objected Mr. James.

"Let her. That's Maud's trouble. No doubt Maud'll manage the job. She's got away with some good things in her time. Maud's got brains. I was her best chance, but . . ."

"D'you *want* this Maud to scoop that half-million dollars?"

"I can't stop her."

"I can though," said Mr. James, with a quiet and sinister determination.

"How?"

The Doctor stared at his young colleague.

Mr. James smiled.

"The girl's husband scoops the pool," he said, and leered triumphant. "Who's clever now? She'll marry me, all-right . . . Only too glad to, by-and-bye," and Mr. James's leer almost shocked Dr. Charters himself.

"Cut it right out," he said, and brought his fist down heavily upon the desk.

"What? Wouldn't I make a fine loving husband for the skirt? I wouldn't treat her rough—unless she needs it."

"Cut it right out, I say. Like blazes you wouldn't treat her rough! But that's nothing to do with it. It's whether I'd treat Maud rough—and I wouldn't.

"I wouldn't double-cross Maud," continued the Doctor earnestly, "for a million. Maud comes to me, her old friend and partner, with a private scheme of her own, a good sound, clever idea of her own, I say—and offers me a generous, fair-and-square rake-off. If you think I'm going to double-cross her, or let anybody else double-cross her, you've got another think coming . . . so cut it right out . . . Can it. And once again, do for Heaven's sake, give up thinking.

"No, Jimmy," the Doctor went on, "there are three little obstacles to your clever scheme . . . In the first place I'm an honest man, and in the second place the girl wouldn't marry

you. She wouldn't be seen dead in the same street with you, Jimmy. And in the third place you're married to Louie. . . . Just tell Louie your scheme, my son . . . !

"And now," added the Doctor, rising from his chair, "suppose you stick to your own job, Jimmy, and not only trust me, but leave all the thinking to me . . ."

Without reply, Mr. James departed thence.

"Oh," he observed to himself, when he had closed the outer door. "You'll do all the thinking, will you? . . . And we're to trust you blind? Like hell we will . . . And the girl won't marry me, won't she? Like hell she won't—when I put her wise that I'm her only way out."

§ 3

Mr. James, walking to and fro in his room, that night, perpended.

There is a tide in the affairs of crooks that, taken at the right time and in the right way —leads to easy money.

One hundred thousand pounds . . .

Half a million iron men—for the taking.

Up and down: to and fro: with pursed lips and scowling brow . . .

Solvitur ambulando.

Should he, or should he not, take the matter into his own hands, follow the promptings and

desires of his own heart, and strike out a line of his own?

Since the Boss was getting chicken-hearted, going batty, and allowing this Waye guy to pull any bunk he liked, should he, Mr. James, double-cross the Boss? Kill two birds with one stone? . . . Or rather, kill the Waye bird—and marry the other bird?

No man had ever yet scored off Mr. James, done him dirt, and got away with it; insulted or man-handled him (as this Waye had done), and lived to brag about it. Not on your life. Suppose he were to bump Waye off, run away with the Lauderdell skirt, "marry" her, and settle down on the hundred thousand that was coming to her on her twenty-first birthday?

Once married to him, she'd soon come to heel, and come across with the dough too, all of it. He had a way with women, all-right, all-right. Treat 'em rough and treat 'em often.

And the girl would be glad enough to marry him—or anybody else—to get away from The Monastery . . . if she were properly handled . . . Jump at the chance. What girl in her right senses would refuse an honourable offer of marriage from Mr. James—apart from any question of the alternative—an incurable "illness." She'd certainly jump at the chance of marrying him, if it were only to shorten her stay in that bedroom by a single month.

Yes—but what would the Boss do?

What could he do? Nothing at all . . . Mr. James knew quite as much about Half-hung Simon as Half-hung Simon knew about Mr. James. Enough to hang him a dozen times over. He couldn't do a thing. And with the girl's money safely cached, Mr. James would be independent for life. Independent of the Boss and everybody else . . .

And the money became the girl's, absolutely, on September the first, when she was twenty-one . . . Suppose Mr. James prevented that particular bit of partridge-shooting, by bolting with the partridge? . . . Why let Maud have all that great wad of dough, and only peel off a measly ten thousand for those who landed it? . . . Shame to bump off a pretty girl like the little Marjorie skirt.

Yes—Mr. James would make up to her forthwith, and when she was about at the end of her tether, propose both matrimony and escape.

She'd take the former for the sake of the latter, if for no other reason . . .

Yes—but what about his own lawful wife, Louie the Lady? . . . Well, she'd get what was coming to her, if she couldn't listen to reason—and have the common decency to stand down, at any rate until the cash was cached—the jealous cat . . .

CHAPTER IX

"The Consul's brow was sad
And the Consul's speech was low."

SO were those of Dr. Charters. And so, this bright morning, were those of the set of relentless and murderous scoundrels, male and female, who formed the gang of which he was the brains.

It was evident, even to Dr. Studley, Sister Weldon, the other nurses and the patients, that their beloved Matron, nice kind Nurse Jones, watchful and attentive Mr. James, clever Dr. MacAdoo, and even the revered and admired Dr. Charters himself, had something on their minds, were preoccupied, worried, upset about something.

And upon the minds of the five there was something terrible indeed—something incredible, monstrous, nauseating—the realisation of abysmal profundities of human depravity hitherto mercifully concealed from them.

"It surely is the most plumb god-awfullest wicked thing I ever heard of," said Mr. James, "and I tell you, Boss, I don't stand for it. It

was bad enough when we thought it was a stranger, and knew him innocent . . . How on earth did they come to pick on Chink Dorson ? "

" *How ?* " snapped the Doctor. " Because Waye put them on to him. He wrote the anonymous letter to the police, and it gave them something to work on. They arrested Chink, got his record, and framed this case on him."

" Yes, but why ? " persisted Mr. James. " Why should Waye want to get Chink framed ? "

" Oh, ask me some questions," snarled the Doctor. " As soon as somebody—anybody—is hanged for the murder of Spider Schlitz, it lets Waye out, doesn't it ? He must have known that Chink was in England, and that his record would go against him . . . and, for all we know, he may have had it in for Chink. He may have been out to get him, and thought it would be a real wise-crack and clever doings —to put the police on to poor Chink for the murder that he himself had committed . . . Anyway, it's the unspeakable, unbelievable limit—that he should lie in bed here, sipping his tea and nibbling his toast, at eight o'clock in the morning, while Chink is walking from his cell to the scaffold, with the awful sky-pilot marching ahead of him and reading the burial service over him while he's alive and warm."

A shudder ran through the company gathered in the consulting-room, as the Doctor's voice almost broke.

"You've said it, Boss, it's the unspeakable limit," said Mr. James; "and if you haven't reached the limit, I have. Your Mr. Unspeakable Unbelievable Skunk is going to get his . . . And get it from me . . . And right now."

"And look here, Chief," broke in Dr. MacAdoo, "we must save poor old Chink Dorson. It's . . . too awful. It's . . ."

Dr. Charters turned his stern regard first upon the Matron and then upon Nurse Jones.

Not from them had come the merciful appeal. Sardonically he eyed the ladies, and neither of them spoke.

"At our own risk, Manoel?" he asked. "Send for the police and hand Waye over to them—to tell them all he knows?"

"We must do something," expostulated Dr. MacAdoo indignantly.

"*I'm* going to do something all-right," Mr. James assured him.

"Yes," Dr. Charters assured Mr. James in turn. "You're going to do exactly what I tell you, and nothing else."

Mr. James sniffed significantly.

"Look here," continued the Doctor. "And

once again let my brains save your necks. You can cut the police-idea right out, and you can cut the killing-idea right out, too ; for I won't have the police sent here about a dead Waye, any more than I'll bring them here about a live one. But we've reached the limit, and this is where Waye gets off . . . I'll give him an ultimatum. . . . The day Chink's hanged, Waye goes, or he never goes at all. He stays with us for keeps . . . in the bone-orchard . . . I'll tell him we've decided that we'll be delighted to take the risk of killing him, and that we'll give him a nastier and stickier death than he's ever heard of. I'll make him believe that, as soon as he's dead and buried, we're going to tell Sir Bernard Matthieson that his eccentric patient has simply bolted, and that we're a bit anxious, for it's *our* unaltered opinion that he's not only mad but dangerous . . . I'll make him believe we're going to prove to his Solicitor and Banker—and he's provided us with witnesses enough—that he went hopelessly mad and escaped before we could get him certified . . . Just escaped like any lunatic escaping from a lunatic asylum.

"But mind you, Jimmy, we're not going to do it."

"Aren't we?" growled Mr. James sarcastically.

"No, we're not. A dead Waye is going to be

a thundering sight more dangerous to us than a live one. As soon as Chink's hanged, there's no further need, excuse, or reason, for Waye to hide here; and there's no earthly reason why he should return our hospitality, help, and kindness, by rounding on us . . . And if he does, who's going to listen to the delusions, delirium and mad mutterings of the escaped lunatic for whom Dr. Charters is hunting everywhere . . .

"And we can't do anything to help Chink," he added. "No. Not a thing. We can't lift a finger."

"Be Jasus, that Waye's the bad man, the wicked divvle," observed the Matron.

"The swine ain't fit to live," opined Nurse Jones.

"Too awful," agreed Mr. James.

"Sub-human: a monster," said Dr. MacAdoo.

"It's the worst thing I ever heard of," admitted Dr. Charters. "But there it is—and if the man's got absolutely no conscience at all, poor Chink's got to swing."

And as his colleagues filed out and left him alone, the Doctor smiled, and stroked his beard as he added:

"Yes—Chink Dorson's got to swing—and the sooner the better. Absolutely splendid! . . . Thank you, Mr. Waye . . ."

§ 2

By roundabout paths, John Waye, scouting warily and with occasional halts behind trees and shrubs, to make sure that he was not followed, made his way to a distant and secluded nook in The Monastery ruins where, as he hoped, and anticipated, Marjorie Lauderdell again awaited him.

"Well?" he said, the stare of his hard eyes softening incredibly, a tender smile sweetening his bitter mouth, his whole face changing from that of one who hates to that of one who loves. "Everything all-right?"

"Yes, in a way. Come and sit down here," and Marjorie patted the turf beside her. "I am so glad you've come."

"And I'm so glad you're glad. Are you glad that I'm glad that you're glad?" smiled John Waye, and succeeded in making Marjorie twinkle.

"You've taken no 'medicine'?" he asked.

"No, and I've been perhaps unnecessarily careful to make it appear that I have taken it regularly."

"That's right. I don't think there's the very slightest danger, but there's no harm in being over-careful. I've taken steps which I think have made you as safe as all the other patients in the house."

"But you wouldn't go away and leave me here, would you?" begged Marjorie.

"That I promise you," and, taking the girl's hand, the man added, "I'd be as likely to go away and leave myself here," whereat the girl smiled a little more happily.

"I know you wouldn't. I trust you absolutely, and I'll do anything you tell me to do . . . I only said it because someone else has offered to take me away from here."

"*What?* Who?"

"Mr. James."

The warmth and fervour of John Waye's exclamation surprised Marjorie Lauderdell.

"Yes," she said. "Mr. James."

"Oh, don't look like that," she added.

"Like what?"

"Cruel, dangerous, savage . . . wicked."

"Then I'd better look hypocritical, for I feel all that and much worse. Rosemary . . . Marjorie, I mean . . . this man James is . . ."

"My dear friend, you couldn't possibly tell me anything that would make me distrust and fear and hate this man James more than I do."

"Tell me what he said, Marjorie, dear."

"I'll tell you everything. . . . I'll tell you his exact words, almost; and I'll imitate his beastly voice . . . Yesterday evening, after dinner, I was sitting in my room, when there came a knock at the door. Thinking it was a

maid or nurse, I called ' Come in,' and in walked this man James.

" As I stared in amazement, he shut the door and leant against it, and then, with a great air of secrecy, said :

" ' *Ssh! I want to speak to you. Most important . . . For* you, *that is . . . I'm your friend. I want to help you.*'

" ' Will you please go out of my room instantly,' I said, and glanced at the bell.

" ' *Say, don't be silly,*' he said. ' *I'm not going to do you any harm. I want to help you. I've only come here for your good. Can't I speak to you?* '

" It seemed to me that there could be no harm in hearing what he had to say, and as I was between him and the bell, I could really compel him to go when I wanted to. So I just sat and stared at him and made no reply whatever.

" ' *See here,*' he went on hurriedly, ' *I want to speak to you in confidence, and for you not to tell a living soul a single thing I say. It's only for your good. I only want to help you.*'

" Still I said nothing at all.

" ' *See here now. I'm your friend. That Aunt of yours—Maud . . . She's a bad lot. She doesn't want you to get any better. She doesn't want you to get well at all, see? She's hoping your illness will end before you're twenty-*

one, see? Then your uncle comes into your money instead of you—and Maud'll get the handling of that big wad . . . See? . . .

"'*Now we do just occasionally lose a case here, though very, very few, for the Doctor's a wonder.*

"'*Yes, the Doctor's a real wonder. And I'm afraid you'll be one of the cases we shall lose. See what I mean? . . .*'

"I sat perfectly silent and still, and stared at the creature.

"'*Now you want to get right away from here,*' he went on, '*and you can't do it . . . Not without my help. Any letters you write may, or may not, be put in the bag when the Doctor clears the post-box in the hall. He always does that himself—before giving the bag to the gate-keeper who comes for it twice a day. The Doctor's such a careful man. He'd hate a patient's letter to go astray—or to go anywhere else, if it was one of yours. And if you got a message to your uncle—which you couldn't—d'you think Maud would let him start anything? She'd tell him that what you wrote was the best proof that you were in the right place, and absolutely clear proof, too, that you'd gone potty, as the Doctor feared you would.*'

"I felt myself going positively sick and faint, but I thought it would be best to hear him out. I might learn something new.

"'*You want to get clear away from here, right*

now,' he went on, *' and I'm the only one that can get you out. The gate-keeper would let you pass if I was with you, and told him it was all-right. But you couldn't get out of here in a hundred years, otherways.*

" *' This isn't any prison,'* he grinned, *' but the Doctor can't have any of his border-line mental cases wandering out and losing themselves, nor any of his convalescents clearing out before they're as well as they think they are. He's responsible for them . . . Responsible to those who brought them here, and don't you forget it was Maud brought you here—with her husband's knowledge and consent.'*

" I think my absolute silence made him a little uncomfortable.

" *' Well, what d'you say ? '* he asked.

" I said nothing whatever.

" *' See here, I'm your friend,'* he informed me once again. *' I want to help you. I want to get you right out of here. I don't want a thing except to help you.*

" *' And d'you know why ? I'll tell you, though you've surely guessed it—a lovely girl like you.*

" *' I'm in love with you.'*

" I shuddered and seemed to feel myself go pale.

" *' Sure thing, I am,'* he continued. *' Why, I fell in love with you, lill' gel, the first moment I set eyes on you. Love at first sight and second*

sight, too, and every sight. Each time I seen you, I fell deeper and deeper in love—till now I can't live without you. I cert'nly can't.

"'*An' see here, you can't live without me, either—for you won't get any better here. You ain't meant to get better. And if I can't live without you, and you can't live without me—why . . . there it is.*

"'*Now, I don't s'pose you've fallen in love with me like I have with you, but you'd rather leave here and marry me, than stop here and —not get well, wouldn't you? And if you don't love me now, you would afterwards, all-right, all-right. You'd be just as happy as a lill' bird. I don't drink, nor gamble, nor shoot craps, nor anything. And I got a real kind heart.*

"'*What about it, lill' gel?*'

"I still remained silent, partly because I couldn't speak.

"'*And look here,*' he added, with a hint of annoyance in his tone. '*Don't you think that anybody else but me can get you out of here. Don't you think that fella Waye is going to help you. He couldn't if he would, and he wouldn't if he could—not what* I *call help. He'd marry you for your money, perhaps, IF he could get you out of here . . .* If . . . If, *seven times.* If—and then If . . .

"'*You beware of that fella Waye, he's a real bad man.*

" ' Now, I been tellin' you a lot of things in confidence, and I'll tell you something more. That man Waye is an old lag, an ex-con, a convict, a gaol-bird, a thief and a murderer, who served a term of penal servitude—and that's not in confidence either. You can tell anyone you like. Ask him yourself if he did a five year jolt at San Paolo gaol and see how he takes it. Spring it on him suddenly, and see if he looks good.

" ' Well, you wouldn't trust yourself to a man like that, would you? Not even if he could do anything for you . . . Except wickedness. I could tell you a lot more about that man Waye, and I reckon it's enough for a sensible gel like you, if you know he's a gaol-bird.'

" I still stared in silence, but I was trying hard to summon strength to say what I wanted to say—in the way in which I wanted to say it. I did not want my voice to tremble and let that creature think I was afraid —think I had any feeling but an utter scorn of him, an almost uncontrollable nausea at the sight of his face and the sound of his voice.

" ' So there it is, lill' gel,' he went on. *' That's what I come to say. I'll get you out of here, right now, and marry you at once. What d'you say? '*

" And he put on a smile that almost prevented my saying anything.

"I stood up and pressed the bell.

"'I say this,' I answered him, 'that I would rather spend the rest of my life in this house, or die to-night in this room, than ever speak to you again. I'd sooner be tortured to death in the most horrible way imaginable, than leave here with you.'

"'*Is that your last word?*' he asked, his voice and face changing remarkably.

"'I sincerely hope it's my last word to you,' I replied, 'for I think you're a loathsome, despicable, treacherous, and lying beast.'

"And then there came a tap at the door, and he had to open it.

"Doing so, he came face to face with Nurse Jones, and you should have seen her face and heard her voice as she said:

"'*And pray what are* you *doing in here!*'

"I really felt that she was my devoted friend, she seemed so savagely indignant, so shocked, almost . . .

"That's all, my dear," Marjorie concluded. "Oh, *don't* look like that. I hate to see you look so . . . so . . ."

But John Waye's face did not change. Staring at the turf before him, his fists clenched, his eyes blazing, his expression that of a tortured wild beast, he repeatedly murmured:

" Mr. James! . . . Mr. James! . . . Mr. James! . . ."

§ 3

" Come along to my room," Nurse Jones had said quietly, as Mr. James closed Marjorie's door behind him.

" Now," said she when they had entered that sanctuary, " what's the game? Spill the tale—and watch your step, Jimmy, for you're mine, and I'd tear your throat out if I found you double-crossing me with another woman. You know what I was when you first tempted me, as decent a girl as any in England or America, and you know what you made me."

" Aw! Cut that out," snarled Mr. James.

" Yes, and I'll cut your heart out, if you give me cause. When you took me out of nursing, and out of a decent life, you took me for keeps, and don't you forget it. You gave me a raw deal and made me the . . ."

" Aw, *can* it, will you. There's too much comes out of your face. Give it a rest, you . . ."

" And don't you forget another thing. I know enough about you, James Gryde, to send you to 'the chair,' and if you didn't get there, it would be because you'd fallen by the way—fallen through the drop of the scaffold—in the first hanging-State you set foot in . . . Now

then, what's your game with this Lauderdell piece?"

"Well, I'll tell you. Then perhaps next time you've got such a helluva spiel in your neck, you'll keep it there. You'll say a word too much, one of these days. You make me tired. Now get this earful, and feel as silly as you look.

"The Boss has got rattled—as you can see for yourself—over this Waye guy, and has weakened on a proposition that meant a helluva fine wad, and could easily have meant ten times as much. This Lauderdell skirt was brought here by an old-timer side-kicker of his, that the Boss used to work with. The girl comes into a hundred thousand sterling when she's twenty-one. And if she doesn't live to win it, the Boss's old pal gets it, because her husband's the girl's uncle and heir."

Louie the Lady pinched her lower lip and eyed her husband narrowly.

"And if her clock stops before it strikes twenty-one, the Boss gets a rake-off?" she observed.

"You said it. He gets ten per cent, and the fool's throwing in his hand because this damned Waye guy knows all about it. The Boss called it off and thrown his old pal down—and us too. Not that the old devil was going to share that ten thousand."

"Double-cross us?" asked Louie the Lady.

"You said it . . . Well, that lets us out, and we'll double-cross him. We'll do the job he's weakened on, and I'll go and collect from Maud—the Boss's pal . . . and I'll put the screw on her to double the rake-off."

"You speaking the truth—for once?"

"Strike me blind if I'm not."

"I will—with a little vitriol—if I find you double-crossing me."

"Course I'm speaking the truth. Go and ask the Old Man if you don't believe me . . . Serve him right if you went and asked him straight out, now. He'll wonder if the gardener and the butler are going to come and enquire next."

"P'raps I will. Meantime, s'pose you just mention in the course of this conversation what you were doing in that girl's room. If she comes into her spot of cash when she's twenty-one, were you thinking of inheriting the lot by any chance—as her fake husband?"

"My oath, what a mind you've got!" ejaculated Mr. James.

"Yes, Jimmy—how long have I had the benefit of your teaching? What were you doing in that girl's room, I asked you?"

"What d'you think, my good fool? Did you ever hear of a wise crook casting an eye on the lie of the land?"

" Or on the girl ? " sneered Louie the Lady.

" Sister, did I say you make me tired ? I tell you my poor fist is that weary it might fall on you right now. Listen. Did you ever hear of a gunman learning something of the habits of the man he was going to bump off ? Did you ever hear of a yeggman going to have a look at the premises where they keep the safe he's going to blow ? You did ? Fancy that now ! Well, you performing animal, you arithmetic-calculating horse that can count up to four, I went into that girl's room to cast an eye on the lie of the land, I tell you. I wanted to see for myself where she keeps her drinks, and medicines and chocolates and dish of fruit and so on. D'you think I want to go snooping round in the night and have her wake up on me when I knock something over ? She'd rouse the house."

" You were talking to her."

" Course I was, when I stepped inside and found her there. D'you suppose I'd stand scratching my head ? Hadn't I got to make it look natural ? "

" Well, what's the game, now you've seen the colour of the ceiling and the pattern of the carpet, and won't be afraid to go into the room in the dark ? "

" Oh, I'll weaken on it now, like the Boss. Now you're so wonderful helpful . . . And

you'll lose your half of fifty thousand dollars or more, for your cleverness . . . Real vallyble partner you are, aren't you ? "

" When haven't I been ? When have I failed you ? Haven't I done the vilest . . ."

" Now look at here. I've had enough of your jealousy and nagging—more than enough by a jugful. I'm through, and you can . . ."

" Were you going to ask me to help you, Jimmy ? "

" Course I was. But now I tell you I . . ."

" What is it you want me to do, Jimmy ? "

" Get hold of a spot of Manoel's coffin-drops. That Brazilian or Philippine stuff he reckons he's the only white man who has got the low-down on."

" I know."

" D'you know where he keeps it ? "

" No, but he'll give me a drop."

" Would he ? "

" Yes. I can get anything I want out of Manoel," boasted Nurse Jones.

" So ? And you're jealous if I go into a girl's room on business ! Well, go to it then. . . . What'll you tell Manoel you want the poison for ? "

" That it's for a cat I want to get rid of."

" Gee ! And so it is ! " laughed Mr. James.

CHAPTER X

WHEN Mr. James, as he regularly did, in the execution of his duty and the pursuit of his private occasions, moved about the house in the watches of the night or of the small hours of the morning, his silence and comparative invisibility were remarkable. Black clothing, black socks, black gloves and a black silk handkerchief about his face below the eyes, rendered him but a more substantial shadow among the immaterial shadows and darknesses of the passages, stairs, landings, corridors, halls and rooms of the ancient house.

A watchful wary guardian, armed and alert, he acted as though The Monastery was a besieged castle rather than a fashionable nursing-home, and as though a dangerous enemy might attempt entry—such an enemy, for example, as he who entered the house of Mr. Webb of Witherby End—to slay and rob.

There had been, a year or two ago, a story among the domestic staff about a maid who, going to bed quite sane, was discovered later to be quite insane. When her shrieks brought

help, the silly creature could only babble of a black bogey who had come upon her suddenly in the corridor. She had seen it clearly as it passed a moonlit window . . . And another domestic had left because she would not stop in a haunted house, no, not if you doubled her wages.

And now Mrs. Meekins, the housekeeper, was telling Mr. Board the butler, that she didn't know what girls were coming to. Here was Ella Spragge, that very pretty housemaid, wanting to leave, and with a cock-and-bull story about two black bogeys, one following the other. Enough to get the house a name.

And what was the girl doing in the corridor at night? Her *tale* was that she crept out of the room where she and two others slept, and went down to the floor below, because she wanted to ask the nurse on night-duty to give her something for a raging toothache, since she couldn't sleep for the pain.

As she got to the bottom of the service staircase, she saw, according to her own account, "an awful black thing" pass the end of the corridor where there was a shaded light, and, as she stood, trembling in terror, with her heart turning over and over, another—a bigger one—went past the same spot. The next thing she knew was that she was half-sitting, half-lying, at the bottom of the stairs and as cold as death.

When she had "come round a bit more," she had crept to her room, her toothache completely cured.

"What could you do with a girl like that?" asked Mrs. Meekins of Mr. Board.

"Have her up before the Doctor, and let him put the fear of God in her, for a little liar," opined Mr. Board. "I don't believe a word about no toothache."

Just exactly what she had threatened to do, Mrs. Meekin told him, and the frightened girl had said she'd rather meet ten black bogeys.

"Ar!" Mr. Board concluded the conversation. "That gel had bin hearin' some talk in the servants' hall, and thought she'd like to make a sensation, and be right in the middle of it, and get a bit o' self-importance. Gels is like that, till they get 'usbins—then they got somethink better to think about."

And yet *pace* Mr. Board and his poor opinion of a maid's veracity, the shadow that was Mr. James had, upon occasion, a shadow, though he did not cast it.

Mr. John Waye, who now slept but little, and that mostly by day, was invariably awake between the hours of ten, when nurses went off duty for the night, and six in the morning, when maids, nurses, and daylight did appear.

Some part of the night he spent in writing, some in reading, and at certain hours he sat in darkness and in thought, a brooding menace, his sad face grim, a mask of resolution.

It was his unvarying practice, when writing or reading, to sit facing the door of his room, and to keep that door wide open. The night nurse, passing on her rounds at midnight, would see him—that eccentric man—and he would see her, or anyone else who possibly might pass.

Eccentric indeed, for, when the night nurse had made her rounds, and switched off all lights save those at corners, staircases, or intersecting corridors, Mr. Waye, armed with a black pin and a reel of black cotton, would dart across the corridor, stick the pin perpendicularly in the top of the wainscot, attach the end of the cotton thereto, and return to his door. Here he would break the cotton from the reel, and, passing the end of this detached piece through the key-hole, would finally tie it to his little finger, and then, seating himself in his arm-chair, draw it taut.

Thus, across the dark corridor, ran an invisible line of communication that would be tugged and broken by any passer-by, and Mr. Waye be instantly aware of the fact.

Nor would the nocturnal prowler for one moment suppose that, in the dark room behind

Mr. Waye's door, his silent passing was recorded . . .

Upon occasion, waiting for five seconds ere noiselessly opening his door, of which he had well oiled the hinges, Mr. Waye would dimly perceive the figure of a nurse going about her lawful occasions. Whereupon, patiently and carefully, he would re-establish his line, and resume his blind but infallible watch.

And, this night, as was his invariable custom, John Waye sat on guard, and, from time to time, pricked himself with one of the pins he kept for his little tell-tale device. This he did whenever he had yawned or realised that he had nodded . . .

Rosemary . . .

Marjorie . . .

Would they, at the same age, have been indistinguishable? A marvellous likeness. How his heart had leapt, and how nearly he had cried "Rosemary" before them all, when first his eyes had fallen upon her.

Rosemary. . . . Darling Rosemary . . . For Remembrance . . .

Darling beautiful Marjorie . . .

Suddenly, the little finger of John Waye's sensitive hand felt a slight, but quite perceptible, twitch, as might that of a line-fisherman when a small fish nibbled and tugged. Swiftly

he arose, noiselessly opened his door, and, in his black felt-soled bedroom-slippers, crept out into the corridor. Glancing to the left, he could see, by the light of the silk-shaded globe at the far end, that there was nobody in that part of the corridor.

Whoever had passed his door, must be to the right of it—and in a trap, for the passage was a *cul de sac.*

Yes ; stooping low, with his face almost on a level with the carpet, Waye caught a fleeting glimpse of the outline of a dark figure between himself and the tall window that framed an oblong of star-spangled sky.

Rising, he crept swiftly in its direction.

It disappeared.

Touching each door as he passed it, he came to one that was ajar.

Softly pushing it further open, he said in a low clear voice :

" Come out," and stood aside, his left hand raised and levelled.

Scarcely, had he done so, when the dark figure reappeared between him and the faint, faint luminosity of the window at the end of the corridor.

Instantly a little beam of light shone out from a tiny torch in Waye's left hand, and almost instantaneously his right hand shot forth with terrific violence—a blow delivered

with the whole might of a skilled athlete's strength, enhanced by the irrepressible fury of long-pent rage. The heavy fist, crashing upon James's jaw, drove his head with tremendous force against the edge of the stone wall that framed the door.

Without a groan to disturb the silence of the corridor, he sank to the ground.

"You damned dog, you'd go in there, would you?" whispered Waye, and, not gently, stirred the inanimate form of Mr. James with his foot, ere kneeling and removing the black handkerchief that was tied, below his eyes, about his face . . .

There was a movement within the room; a light was switched on; the almost-closed door was opened.

"What is it?" asked Marjorie. "I heard a . . ."

"Ssh! It's all-right," whispered Waye, rising to his feet; and, putting his finger to his lips, he motioned to her with his other hand to go back into the room.

"It's that man!" she said, stepping back.

"Yes . . . He's—met with an accident . . . er . . . fainted. Don't be alarmed—I . . ."

"Is he dead?"

"Afraid not."

"But he *is* . . . Look!"

"Not he. I'll drag . . ."

"Wait."

Turning to her bedside table, Marjorie caught up the jug of water.

"We can't leave him like this. We must bring him round."

And, kneeling beside the prostrate man, she sprinkled drops of water upon his face and hands, and, producing a handkerchief from the pocket of her dressing-gown, dabbed his forehead.

"Don't, child," protested John Waye. "I hate to see you touch the reptile. I'll drag him . . ."

"Get me the glass," said Marjorie. "I believe he's dead."

"I hope . . ." began John Waye.

"He's coming round . . ." interrupted Marjorie. "The glass, quickly."

With a shrug of the shoulders, John Waye entered the room, fetched the glass of water from Marjorie's bedside-table, and put it in the hand the girl held out to him.

"Pour a little more on his hands and head," she directed. "Now raise him up a little."

Mr. James stirred, sighed, and opened his eyes . . . groaned and closed them again.

"Drink some water," said Marjorie, holding the glass to his lips.

Semi-conscious, dazed, bewildered and faint. "What the hell?" sighed Mr. James, and drank.

"Ah!" he groaned, and shuddered.

And, as the man and girl watched him, Mr. James jerked convulsively, sat up suddenly; stared around; gazed into the open room; glared at the glass and at the girl who held it in her hand; shuddered; twitched; clutched his throat; and, with hoarse strangled voice, cried:

"Christ! You've killed me," and, as a violent contortion twisted his body, died—poisoned by the water he had drunk from the glass; poisoned by the draught he had himself prepared.

"Go in, Marjorie," said John Waye firmly, hustling the girl back into her bedroom. "Inside. Quick. I insist."

Seizing Marjorie's trembling hands in a firm steadying grip, he soothed and comforted her.

"He is dead," she cried.

"Marjorie, you were an angel of mercy . . . You did your utmost for him, in spite of the fact that . . . If ever there were a case of returning good for evil! . . . And if he's dead, I killed him. I caused his death before you woke up . . . He really died of the blow I . . ."

"Rubbish," interrupted the girl. "It's all right. I'm all right now . . . I understand.

He came in here and poisoned the water in the glass. I drank a glass-full before I went to sleep, and poured out some more . . . It was quite all-right then . . . before I went to sleep.

"I owe you my life," she added. "But they'll . . ."

"They won't, my dear. Dress at once. This settles it. We're going now. I want you to get ready as quickly as you can, and just bring what you must . . . Now look. If you're nervous, fasten the door after me, by knocking that window-wedge under it—gently—and not so that you can't pull it out again."

"Nervous! I'm too thrilled at the thought of escaping. I'll be ready—but don't be long . . . And can you take that away," she added, with a shuddering glance at the bent body by the door.

"I'm going to. Leave everything to me. Do everything I tell you, and you'll soon be safe. . . . Trust me?"

"I trust you."

Closing the door behind him, John Waye, with a grim frown, seized the corpse and, with a "fireman's lift", raised it, slung it across his shoulder, and hurried away.

Within the minute, he had flung Mr. James's body upon Mr. James's bed.

§ 2

Sister Weldon was a light sleeper, and the sharp insistent tapping at her door brought her out of bed and into dressing-gown and slippers, ere it had well ceased; and her cry of "Come in" reached Waye's ears as he raised his hand to knock again.

"Sister, it's come, as I knew it would, and it's time for us to act," he said as she opened the door. "Bad doings. The man James went into Marjorie Lauderdell's room and poured some devilish poison or other into the jug and the glass of water that stood on her bedside-table. I followed him and caught him coming away, and without waiting to find out what he'd done, knocked him down for going into the girl's room at four in the morning.

"Hearing the noise, Marjorie came out and insisted on trying to bring him round, for she thought he might be dead. He looked it. She dashed some of this water on him, it being the nearest thing to hand; and when he began to come round she gave him the water in the glass to drink.

"It killed him. I've put him on his bed. I'm going to fetch Charters and tell him what happened."

"Are you sure he's dead? Can't I do anything?" interrupted Sister Weldon, shocked

to the depths of her being, but cool and efficient —and, searching Waye's face with calm experienced eyes, she knew that he was speaking the plain and simple truth, without palliation or exaggeration.

This was a very different John Waye from the one who had, for some reason, shammed lunacy to her, as well as to the rest, in the days before he had visited her brother and explained himself, to that innocent and simple-minded man's satisfaction.

"Can't I do anything?" she repeated.

"You can, Sister. And that's why I've come to you first. You can get the girl out of this house at once, and take her to your brother. I'll come with you, if I may."

"Certainly. Of course . . . You haven't told the Doctor or raised any alarm yet? I'll ring up Levitt at the gate-house, and tell him the car is to be ready, out on the road, in five minutes, and that I myself shall be taking two patients away. . . . He'll know it's all-right, and will obey me as he would the Doctor himself."

"You're coming too, Sister? Like this—at a moment's notice?"

"I am. And I'm coming straight back, as soon as I have seen you both safe in the Vicarage."

"Good man, Sister," commended Waye gratefully.

"Well, I doubt whether you'd ever get away otherwise. Levitt is a faithful British bulldog; and, with many apologies to me, he'd ring the Doctor up for confirmation if I were seeing you two off alone—though he'll be perfectly content to let you go off in my charge.

"I'd come anyway," she continued, turning to her desk and picking up the telephone which communicated with the Lodge, "and see Marjorie safe. . . .

"Hallo!" she called and a minute later turned from the telephone with the remark, "It's all right . . . Unless the Doctor acts first, and . . ."

"I shan't call him until you and Marjorie are out of the house," interrupted Waye.

"Why call him at all?"

"I've got something to say to him. Something that's got to be said. If I don't join you within ten minutes of your getting into the car, don't wait for me."

"Wouldn't you be in great danger? You might not be able to get out," warned Sister Weldon.

"Then I'd stop in," smiled John Waye grimly. "For keeps."

"Well then, you go and get Marjorie, while I dress, and see us out of the house before you call the Doctor. I'll get into the car and start

it up. I'll then give you ten minutes, or until there are any signs of anything being wrong . . . I'll keep Levitt talking, until you come, or until I see good reason to throw in the clutch."

§ 3

Dr. Charters was also a light sleeper, and sat up, instantly wide awake and alert, as his light was switched on, and a harsh voice said:

"Get up!"

"*You!* What d'you want?"

"You."

"What's the matter?"

"Murder's the matter. Your foul, slinking, treacherous reptile, James . . ."

The Doctor threw back the clothes and sprang out of bed.

"Murdered?" he cried.

"No. Punished for murder. Caught in his own trap."

"He's hurt?"

"Come with me . . . His room . . ."

Snatching a heavy overcoat and pulling it on as he hurried along, Dr. Charters dashed ahead of John Waye, ran up the stairs and threw open the door of James's bedroom.

In a few seconds his professional eye told him the worst, and, as Waye entered the room, he saw the hard, self-contained, inscrutable

man suddenly break down, go utterly to pieces, burst into tears of uncontrollable emotion, and heard him, with rending sobs, cry aloud:

"Oh Jimmy! Jimmy! My son, my son! Oh James, my son!"

And, as John Waye watched, the storm passed almost as the illumination of lightning passes; blankness closed down; and, half-turning from the body, the father asked quietly, coldly:

"You did this?"

"No; only indirectly, I'm sorry to say."

"Poisoned . . . His head is bleeding, too. Who struck him?"

"I did."

Dr. Charters turned again to the body of his son, embraced it, half raising it from the bed, one arm behind and beneath it. Suddenly, with the swiftness of a panther, he whirled about; but, ere his extended hand could come to rest, John Waye struck from it the pistol it had just drawn from the dead man's hip-pocket. Swiftly Waye snatched it from the ground.

"I ought to have thought of that," he observed coolly.

Dr. Charters sank back in a sitting position beside the body of his son.

"And now you'll shoot me, too?" he said. "Well . . . go on. I've had enough," and

he took his son's dead hand between his own. "Kill me too. Go on."

"No! Oh, no! Not yet, Half-hung Simon . . . Not here and now! But some time; some time; never fear. Your punishment will come, all-right—perhaps when you least expect it. So sit and wait for it. Wait for it, Simon; watch for it; look for it; listen for it. . . ."

"My son, my son," groaned Charters, stroking the hair, the face, the hands of the dead man. "My son, my son. The only thing I ever loved."

"Yes, Simon. D'you know now how it feels? And if a pariah hound like you can suffer so at the loss of a poisonous carrion cur like that, what do you imagine a man feels at the loss of the loveliest, the sweetest . . ."

"You devil! Who *are* you?" cried Charters, springing to his feet.

"Who am I, eh? You shall know when the time comes, Charters. All in good time, believe me, you shall know—when your time comes . . . And listen, Simon. Spider Schlitz is gone, the life choked out of his lying throat—by his enemy's hand. . . . Chink Dorson is nearly gone, though still alive and warm in his bed in the death cell, for he hangs in four hours' time, the life choked out of *his* lying throat—by a hempen rope.

"Gunman Gryde is gone; your son James,

the son whose feet you put upon the path that led him to that death; the breath choked in *his* lying throat—by poison.

"All gone, Simon, and you're being kept for the last. But not for long, Simon—or again, perhaps for very long. . . . So *watch* and *wait* and *look* and *listen*, Simon.

"And, meanwhile, clear out of this Nursing-Home and take that snake Machado with you, and those two infamous she-devils, your wife, Fanny the Procuress, and your son's wife, Louie the Pimp; and wherever you may go, remember this—I will punish you there, Simon, and you shall have a filthy end . . ."

And as Charters again turned and embraced the body of his son, John Waye backed from the room, locked the door behind him, and, having first visited the Doctor's bedroom and consulting-room, hurried swiftly to the waiting car.

§ 4

"It's almost unbelievable," said the Reverend Laurence Weldon as, sketchily arrayed, he sat opposite John Waye in the Vicarage sitting-room, an hour later, while, upstairs, his sister gave tea and comfort to a pale and slightly tearful Marjorie.

"*Do* you still believe it, by-the-way?" asked his guest.

"Your own story? Oh, absolutely. Don't

think I was casting doubt," answered the Vicar warmly. "Besides, doesn't Marjorie's actual personal experience confirm all you've told us? It's amazing. But life *is* amazing. There is no getting away from the fact that truth is stranger than fiction. What'll happen there now?"

"He'll bolt. They'll all bolt the moment they know I've cleared out like this—for fear I blow the gaff and put the police on them. . . . Charters will bolt all the quicker if he first discovers that Marjorie is gone. He'll wonder whether . . ."

"But the police ought to be called in," interjected the Vicar. "I feel very strongly that we . . ."

"Yes," interrupted Waye. "But, you remember, when I told you the whole story, you agreed to take no action."

"I did," said the Vicar, "but I . . ."

"Yes, I know," said Waye, "but look here. Do you realise that, in spite of all this, the place is an admirable and perfectly-run Nursing-Home doing excellent work—and it's crammed full of sick people. Some of them about as ill as they can be. What's to happen to them? Surely the right thing is for Dr. Studley and your sister to carry on, with the highly qualified and able staff that they've got. The moment that Charters, Machado, and the two women are out of the house—and I'll bet they are out

of it this night—as soon as they have buried James—there isn't a soul there who isn't absolutely above suspicion."

"H'm," said the Vicar. "I hate the idea of letting them go . . . And that Lauderdell woman."

"Not a shadow of proof," said John Waye. "It was half guess-work on my part, as it was. Not Charters himself could prove anything against her, even if he wanted to do so. To save his life he couldn't prove anything."

"There's one certainty," observed the Vicar. "Marjorie mustn't go back to that vile woman's house."

"Good Heavens, no! Charters having failed her, she'd soon find some other instrument."

"And I suppose the uncle, her husband, is a broken reed?"

"Hopeless. Absolutely hopeless. Thoroughly weak and vacillating in the first place, and an utter hopeless fool to boot. . . . Completely under the woman's thumb, and would believe anything she told him."

"And old Studley and Angela are to run The Monastery, eh?" smiled the Vicar, a twinkle in his eye.

"Why not? . . . Certainly, at any rate, until the present patients are disposed of. They wouldn't admit any new ones, of course."

"But suppose Charters & Co. don't bolt?"

"Then take any steps you feel impelled to take . . . I only beg of you to let me get well out of the country first. As I told you, I am very much in hiding myself."

The Vicar frowned in deep thought.

"Yes," he said.

"There's no need for haste," continued Waye. "There's no real reason why they should be arrested at once, if they don't bolt. As I have said—it is a splendid nursing-home most competently and excellently run. No-one there will come to any harm. This business of Marjorie was an isolated incident . . . a matter of obliging an old friend, and making a large sum of money without trouble or risk. That gang had retired from business, finally and permanently, and had 'got away with it' . . . living blameless lives in a highly lucrative job and a safe retreat in a new country.

"Charters was a very clever doctor and had roped in an even cleverer one in Machado, a minor crook whom he picked up in Chicago as the ideal partner for his scheme. And Charters' wife, 'Frisco Fanny, who had run some mighty different 'homes' in San Francisco, Chicago, and New York, was a most able woman who could deceive the devil himself. While the other fiend, his daughter-in-law, actually was an English trained nurse before James got hold of her in America, and she turned criminal.

"No, I firmly believe that, but for this Lauderdell woman, that gang would have been safe, and The Monastery a safe place for them —and for their patients."

"And what becomes of Marjorie now?"

"If I looked ten years younger than I do . . . and were on firmer ground . . ." said John Waye. . . . "Do you know—I am not forty yet, although I am so grey-haired . . ."

Again Laurence Weldon frowned in deep thought and much perplexity.

"She has a huge fortune," he said doubtfully.

"Yes," agreed John Waye. "She has . . ."

§ 5

Meanwhile,

"Now you just settle down and go to sleep, my dear," said Sister Weldon in the room above, "and just realise that you're as safe as safe."

"I could never thank you enough, Sister—but neither could I go to sleep. Do stop if you can, and talk to me for a little while."

Sister Weldon pulled up an arm-chair, and seated herself in it.

"That's nice, Sister; don't go till you must . . . And where am *I* to go? I can't quarter myself on your brother indefinitely, however much I should love to."

"Well; my dear, that question doesn't arise yet, surely. You've hardly got here."

"No, but I do want to talk to you about it, before you go back to the Nursing-Home."

"Have you no other relations but your guardian and his wife?"

"Only one; and he's in India. I think I'll go there."

"My dear, what a long way! Is he married too?"

"He wasn't when I last heard from him."

"How long ago was that?"

"Oh, weeks. I don't think my aunt has troubled to send his letters on."

"He writes regularly then?"

"Never misses."

"Oh! You're great friends then? A near relation?"

"Not too near."

"And would he be glad to see you?"

"Rather."

"And could you stay with him all-right?"

"Oh yes. . . . indefinitely," and Marjorie smiled happily.

Sister Weldon promptly arose and kissed her.

"You monkey!" she said. "And never word all this time."

"Oh, it's a great secret," laughed Marjorie. "Nobody knows but us. We've been secretly engaged since he went out to India a year

ago. We were only waiting till my twenty-first birthday, when I shall be my own mistress. I couldn't marry until then, without my guardian's consent ; and he made it quite clear that there wasn't going to be any consent—either for Reggie or anybody else. . . . He pretended it was because no girl knows her own mind until she is twenty-one, and he was afraid I would marry in haste and repent at leisure. But of course it was his wife who told him what to say . . . For some reason she couldn't bear any young man to come near me, however eligible he might be."

" And do you love this Reggie very much ? " enquired Sister Weldon sentimentally.

" Reggie's all-right," replied the young lady, and laughed.

" What's he doing in India ?

" Oh, helping to keep the peace between Hindu and Mussalman while waiting for the new Indian Mutiny that we are asking for. He's a soldier. Captain Lauderdell, Bengal Lancers."

" Darling, how thrilling," exclaimed Sister Weldon. " How I envy you. You'll have to send him a cable."

" Yes. Then he'll meet me in Bombay and we'll be married quietly in the Cathedral there. I'll go by the next boat. I shall be twenty-one before I get there."

"My dear, what a hustler. You'll want a passport—and some money."

"Only enough to get me there . . . with a few clothes. I don't want any white satin and orange-blossom doodahs."

"Oh, Marjorie, don't you? I should just love . . ."

"I shouldn't. Tweeds and a registrar's office would do me nicely, if we were getting married in England. I think it's a rotten idea that the most private and personal thing of your life should be made a public show and a fancy-dress carnival."

"My brother could sign the form for your passport, and take the necessary photographs for it," said Sister Weldon, changing the subject.

"What dears you are! I am so grateful to you both," Marjorie replied warmly. "You will come out and see us, won't you?"

"I'll come for my honeymoon."

"Oh, darling! Who is it?"

"It isn't—yet," laughed Sister Weldon. "And now you're to try to go to sleep. I am going to darken the room."

§ 6

"I shall go with her," said John Waye, as the three sat at breakfast a little later.

The brother and sister eyed him in some surprise, and perhaps in a little doubt.

"I'll see her safe into the hands of this Captain Lauderdell," he said.

"If I like the look of him, and he seems all right," he added.

"You'll go to India?" said the Vicar.

"Yes. Why not? The sooner I get out of England the better, and I can't live again in America . . . I'm badly 'wanted' there . . . Yes, I'll take her to Bombay . . . If she'll let me, that is. We can't let her leave here alone. She'd have to spend at least one night in London . . . That aunt of hers is capable of anything . . ."

"She ought to be hanged," interrupted the Vicar explosively.

"Not a shadow of proof, as I said before," answered Waye. "She's much too clever for that. And she's clever enough to be on board Marjorie's boat—if she rings up The Monastery and learns from Dr. Studley that Charters and his gang have bolted, and Marjorie is on her way to India."

"I told Marjorie you'd sign her passport application, and take some photographs for it," said Sister Weldon to the Vicar.

"Gee!" exclaimed John Waye. "Passports! I've left mine in the pocket of the coat in which I arrived at the Nursing-Home . . . I wonder if you'd secure it for me, Sister, when you go back. I'd be sorry to lose that, after

the trouble I had to procure it! It's a real work of art—executed by the best forger in New York."

"Yes, I'll go to your room and find it, first thing, as soon as I get back," replied Sister Weldon.

But when Sister Weldon went to look for it, the passport was not there.

Without much difficulty, John Waye procured an English passport enabling him to go to India, and thither he went, accompanied by Marjorie Lauderdell.

CHAPTER XI

"YOU absolutely insist on going back at once?" said Marjorie, studying the face of her dear friend, sympathetically, a little sadly.

"Yes, Marjorie. I'm going back," he said.

"Perhaps you'll come out to India again, and see us?" she asked.

"Perhaps," smiled John Waye.

Around them was the shrill turmoil of the Great Indian Peninsular Railway terminus at Bombay, a noise unheard by John Waye as he held Marjorie's hand and said "Good-bye."

He had refused to take his farewell of her elsewhere than in this most public of places, after having given her away, before the altar of Bombay Cathedral.

"You do like Reggie, don't you?" asked Marjorie, glancing to where her husband of an hour was superintending his orderly's bestowal of hand-luggage, bedding, hampers and other impedimenta in the big reserved compartment of the train that was to bear them across the plains of India.

"I approve of Reggie. I pass him. I leave you in his hands without a doubt or a fear. He strikes me as a splendid specimen of a fine type of man—your Indian Army Officer."

"I'm so glad, dear John . . ." said Marjorie flushing warmly. . . . "How can I thank you? . . . How can I ever begin to thank you?"

"By being happy." John Waye patted the hand he held. "Happy as the day is long."

"I shall be that," replied the girl. "But you, John? . . .

"Will you do something for me?" she added.

"I'd do anything for you, Marjorie," was the reply.

"Will you write me a nice long, long letter —all about yourself. I would so like to know all about you, John. All that you care to tell me, that is."

"I was going to do that, anyway, Marjorie. I'd like you to know how and why I became a . . . a . . . criminal and a convict, and came to England with the firm intention of committing at least four murders. I want . . ."

"Come on, Marjorie," called Captain Lauderdell, jumping down from the carriage-door and seizing her arm. "All aboard."

"I say, Sir," he continued, "what on earth can I say, to give you some idea of what I feel? I'm not good at it . . . But, my God,

I never heard of such kindness . . . Straight out and back again, just to hand her over . . . all present and correct . . . And you saved her life too . . . Well, I mean to say . . . anybody'd do that . . . but to fag all the way out to India to hand her over . . . I mean to say . . ."

The young man wrung John Waye's hand.

"Good-bye, dearest John," said Marjorie, and, putting her arms round his neck, she kissed him lovingly.

"Good-bye, darling Rosemary . . . Marjorie," said John Waye huskily, kissing her.

Turning upon his heel he fled from the place.

AN EPILOGUE TO BOOK I

EPILOGUE TO BOOK I

DR. THEODORE CHARTERS, clean-shaven, and remarkably changed in appearance, strolled slowly, moodily and far from jauntily, along Michigan Boulevard . . .

Depressed, heavy and despondent, he went his way; but, from time to time, hummed a popular air as he felt the warmth of the sun, and sniffed the invigorating breeze from the lake.

Indeed he was doing so, audibly, as three stalwart men overtook him, and, ranging up, two on his right side and one on his left, fell into step with him.

"Mr. Waye?" enquired one of them pleasantly.

"Sure. John Waye of this little bright burg."

The men eyed him narrowly.

"Clean-shaven . . . grey eyes . . . Would you mind removing your hat a moment?" continued the man who had accosted Dr. Charters. "Grey hair," he continued. "Nick, probably made by a bullet, in cartilage of right ear."

"Quite right," agreed Dr. Charters coming to a halt and smilingly touching his right ear, where indeed was the mark in question—self-inflicted some months earlier.

"Scar across back of right hand?" enquired the big man.

Promptly Dr. Charters withdrew his glove.

"There you are," he said, and displayed the necessary scar, also self-inflicted some months earlier.

"Got 'ny letters addressed to yourself?"

"Plenty," replied Charters, diving into the pocket of his overcoat and producing several addressed to Mr. John Waye, at a Chicago hotel.

"That's all right . . . Passport?" enquired the man, adding:

"You landed from England on September 30th."

"Certainly. But I don't carry my passport about with me, naturally."

"Where is it?"

"At my hotel."

"I'd like to have a peek at it."

"Why cert'nly. We'll go along, right now."

"We will," said the man.

"And now, what in hell's your game?" enquired Charters, as the four turned about, and marched in the direction whence they had come.

"Just wanted to be sure that you're John Waye," was the non-committal reply.

"Of course I am," replied Charters impatiently. "Who else d'you think I am?"

"I don't think you're anybody else," was the answer.

From his dispatch-case, Dr. Charters produced John Waye's passport.

"Photo's a bad one," he said, "And taken a good many years ago, at that."

"Good enough," replied the detective. "Quite O.K. Fine. You're John Waye all right . . . And now, John, if you'll come along with us, we'll soon put you right where you can finish that life-sentence you walked away from. Coming quietly?"

Dr. Theodore Charters went quietly and indeed from him no sound has since been heard out of the shadows of the prison-house, across the gulf that separates the bond from the free.

For the mantle of John Waye that he had drawn so skilfully about his shoulders, ineluctably conceals his identity—for life . . . unless the real John Waye were discovered, or declared himself.

For life . . .

In San Paolo Gaol.

BOOK II

JOHN WAYE'S STORY

CHAPTER I

MY real name is John Dacre Waye Vanderleur St. Clair, and my father was Dacre Vanderleur St. Clair the multi-millionaire railway, oil, and mining "magnate."

He made his millions quite honestly, and, directly or indirectly, provided work for nearly as many thousands of men as he amassed thousands of dollars.

But, as apparently upon all vast wealth, there was a curse upon his money, a curse inherent in it by reason of its very magnitude, and his life was almost as unhappy as my own has been.

To me, his sole heir, he left The Unsetting Sun and that portion of his wealth that remained after he had dispersed much of it in promoting philanthropic schemes, which ranged from the founding and endowing of universities, hospitals, missions and various branches of research—to the provision of Christmas-trees and toys for poor children.

My first misfortune, attributable to my wealth, was my marriage with a girl who told me, within

a couple of years of our wedding, that she had married me for my money and for nothing else. Also that she loved with all her heart and soul a man, an army-officer, obscure and penniless, whom she had known from babyhood, and had adored from childhood.

This was a heavy blow to me, for I was very fond of her.

However, I could not be such a cur and cad, even if I were such a fool, as to keep tied to me a woman who loved another man—particularly a woman who had laid me under such a debt, such a crushing burden of debt, as she had done, in giving me Rosemary.

I begged Alicia, my wife, to wait a little, to wait till Rosemary began to walk and to talk—and promised her that if she would do so, I would then set her free, if her mind remained unchanged.

I hoped, and I almost believed, that, by that time, she would feel it impossible to leave Rosemary—and I felt that if she could still find it in her heart to leave her baby, the child would, by then, be fitter to face life without her mother.

I had a horror of the bare thought of a sick or suffering child, too young to speak, unable to describe its pain and say what its symptoms were, and what it wanted.

It was quite a foolish idea of mine, of course,

because, after all, one can obtain the services of truly excellent women who can give a child almost everything it needs, and understand it quite as well as a mother could, perhaps. Give it, in fact, everything but mother-love, the one thing that it really wants.

I have not said, and I hardly need to say, that I stipulated that, if Alicia left me, Rosemary should remain in my charge, though of course Alicia would be free to see her whenever she wished to do so.

Well, Alicia went, and I believe, and earnestly hope, that she was thoroughly happy with her soldier.

And there again she, poor girl, came under the curse of my father's wealth. Had it not been for the money which I had settled upon her on our wedding, she would have been unable to marry her lover after she had divorced me, as I allowed her to do, and they would have been unable to purchase and maintain the yacht which was the cause of their death.

Well, they lived happily together, and they died together.

And I was left alone with Rosemary.

I will not attempt to do that impossible thing, describe what Rosemary was to me. I had never been in love up to this time, and indeed I have only been in love once in my life . . .

But oh, how I loved Rosemary.

Of course, one can love with all one's heart and soul, mind and strength, without actually being "in love." I take it that, in the perfect marriage, the man and the woman are, at first, and for a long time, "in love," and, after that, for the rest of their lives, they love.

So it would be absurd to use the expression "I was in love with Rosemary," but I so loved her that she literally filled my life.

My first waking thought was of Rosemary; my last thought, at night. Day by day, week by week, month by month and year by year, she grew more and more wonderful to me. I can hardly say more lovable.

And though I provided her with the best hired mother that money could procure, and with every sort and kind of governess and nurse and servant, I grudged every hour that she spent with them, and contrived that she spent most of her waking hours with me.

I should become wearisome if I continued longer in this strain, as, no doubt, I was wearisome to everyone to whom I spoke of Rosemary, and to everyone to whom I wrote—except on business.

Suffice it to say that Rosemary was my life, and that I loved Rosemary better than my life.

I owned four great houses, and moved from

one to the other, according to the season of the year, so that, as well as having the best of everything else that money could provide, Rosemary should have the best of climate.

And thus, for a dozen years, we lived the most idyllic life, with the truest love and one of the loveliest relationships that ever existed between two human beings. For, thank God, Rosemary loved me as I loved her; and I do not think she was ever really perfectly happy out of my presence.

And then, suddenly, out of the blue, like a thunder-bolt, fell another manifestation of the curse inherent in my father's money. Like all other great fortunes, it had attracted attention. It was famous, and although I had inherited only a part of it, people used my name proverbially, with those of Crœsus, Rockefeller, Pierpont Morgan, and Vanderbilt.

We were at my Californian house, and, after a particularly happy day, during a great part of which Rosemary and I had ridden together, I shared as usual her supper, which we used to call dinner, kissed her good-night and went to see her, again as usual, when she was in bed.

And that was the last time I ever saw Rosemary as the bright, happy, charming, delightful little human-angel that she was.

That night my house was burgled, and with extraordinary skill and cleverness. Dogs were

poisoned, the watchman was sand-bagged, and, in spite of that, not a soul was disturbed.

And what of value was stolen by the burglar or burglars?

Nothing.

Only Rosemary.

The thing of value ten thousand times greater than all the rest of my possessions put together.

Can you imagine the condition that I was in, when I realised that my Rosemary had been taken from her warm bed out into the cold night, like a horse from a stable?

Of course, the possibility of someone making an attempt to kidnap my only child, had occurred to me when, from time to time, I read accounts in the papers, of the children of wealthy and prominent people being kidnapped and held to ransom.

But it had not been an ever-present fear, partly because Rosemary lived so much under my own eye, and partly because she was constantly surrounded by a faithful and devoted circle of her own personal protectors and servants—the lady-housekeeper in whose personal charge she was, the nurse, the under-nurse, her English governess, her French governess, her groom, her chauffeur, the boy who looked after her dogs, any one of whom, I verily believe, would have laid down his or her life to save Rosemary from harm.

When I realised the child was gone, utterly gone without a sound or a sign, I had to take a tight hold upon myself.

I did so.

But in the most secret depths of my innermost soul I swore that I would leave no stone unturned, no dollar unspent, first, to recover Rosemary, and secondly, to punish those who had been guilty of this outrage, this infamy, of terrifying, stealing, and thereby maltreating a child—for the sake of money

My days and my sleepless nights were a compound of misery and of wrath. Alternately I was paralysed with a sense of fear, of horror, of grief, and galvanised by a burning rage against those who had dared to tear the child from her home and her happiness, and to keep her a prisoner.

The police, a great detective agency, scores and scores of private detectives, and other private individuals who were likely to be useful, were constantly at work.

Those who were in a position to know best, assured me that I should very soon receive some communication from the kidnappers, making proposals for the safe return of the child as soon as certain conditions had been complied with; and it was this hope that buoyed me up and kept me going, for it took the place of sleep and food.

Again and again I was assured by the police, by detectives, and by the various crooks with whom these people put me in touch, that it was perfectly certain, perfectly obvious, that the child had only been kidnapped for ransom; and that, as soon as the criminals had laid their plans for the safe receipt of the ransom money, the child would be returned unhurt; and I was advised instantly and fully to comply with the demands of the kidnappers.

There would be time enough, when my child was returned to me, to consider the question of punishment, and the recovery of the ransom which I should have, perforce, to pay.

The advice was unnecessary.

Should they demand the payment of a sum of money that represented the value of everything that I possessed in the world, they should have it; and if they demanded twice as much, they should have that, for I would borrow it.

Oh, they should have it! But I promised myself that, unless I died before my mission was fulfilled, I would have *them*. Yes, they should have it; and, yes, I would have them.

And my advisors of course were right.

Sure enough, some three weeks after Rosemary's disappearance, and just when I was about at the end of my tether, I received a letter, not—as one might have expected—an illiterate, ill-spelt, ill-written composition on

cheap and dirty paper, but a business-like letter, in good style, and obviously written by a person of education and experience.

This document set forth, as I had been led to expect, the terms on which I should receive Rosemary back, safe and sound. There were no vulgar threats or anything of that nature, but merely a plain and straightforward business offer which I could accept or reject.

I was assured that, on my completing my side of the bargain, my daughter would be returned to me, and that I should never be in any way molested again.

If, on the other hand, I failed to fulfil my part of the contract, I should never see my child again ; and if, by any practically impossible chance, she were recovered by the police or other agency, and returned to me, I might be perfectly certain that I should never know another moment's peace—for the child would promptly be kidnapped again.

There was, as I have said, no threat of murder or injury, or anything of that sort, but merely the statement that if I wanted to recover, and to keep, my child—I must fulfil their demands.

I quite agreed with the great private detectives to whom I showed the letter, that this was not one of the old-fashioned gangs of ruffianly bandits, but a criminal or band of criminals of superior mentality and up-to-date

methods; and therefore far more difficult to deal with and circumvent.

And there was further evidence of this in the demands themselves—which meant a colossal loss to me.

In the first place, they wanted our famous family diamond, known as The Unsetting Sun; and, in the second place, I was directed to purchase one hundred other diamonds, each of the value of not less than ten thousand dollars.

Evidently the scoundrels had no intention of being traced by means of paper money, bills or bonds.

They pointed out to me that the immediate receipt by them of The Unsetting Sun would indicate my desire to recover my daughter at the cost indicated, and that, further, such immediate compliance would have a favourable effect on her health and condition.

For the collection of the hundred diamonds, a fortnight would be allowed, and my daughter would be returned safely to me as soon as the kidnappers had satisfied themselves that the stones were genuine and of the stipulated value.

I was then most specially warned that if there were any "hanky-panky" of any kind, such as sending a model of The Unsetting Sun and inferior or imitation diamonds; or if any one of the latter were estimated by their expert as being worth less than ten thousand

dollars—my daughter would not be returned to me.

The writer went on to say that, presumably, he need not trouble to warn me against the childish stupidity of endeavouring to set a police trap, or any other kind of trap.

The Unsetting Sun was to be posted in a registered parcel to a box-address in Chicago. The parcel would be called for by a messenger who would himself be instructed by an individual who knew neither the name nor the face of the writer of this letter.

The one hundred diamonds were to be sent in a registered parcel, a fortnight later, to another box-address in New York, where they would again be collected by an innocent person entirely ignorant of the writer's identity.

It would, of course, be the simplest matter in the world for the police to keep watch, and to arrest the messenger directly he or she called for the parcel; but the arrested person, with the best will in the world to be helpful, could only lead them to another as innocent and ignorant as the actual messenger.

And should this second person be arrested, he would be unable to give any useful information, even if he wished to do so.

Eventually, an astute detective or a bullying third-degree officer might possibly arrive at a person who knew something, but that person

would not squeal. And by that time, where would the kidnapped child be? And how long a time would elapse before negotiations could again be re-opened by a sadder and a wiser parent?

After a careful study of this letter, I decided not to show it to the official police at all, for their object and purpose would naturally be not quite identical with mine. Their main desire would be to effect the arrest of a dangerous criminal or criminals, and, incidentally, to recover my child; whereas my main desire was to get Rosemary back, and, incidentally and afterwards, to get the scoundrels who had kidnapped her.

First things first.

Let me regain my Rosemary lost, and my Paradise Lost.

Revenge and punishment could wait.

So, as I say, I decided that I would not show this letter to the official police, but would act upon it instantly; for I could not bear the thought that some official effort, to take the criminal red-handed, might lead to the postponement or destruction of my chance of recovering Rosemary . . .

And here I might tell you something about this diamond, The Unsetting Sun, with the name of which you are, no doubt, familiar.

My grandfather, who had a passion for precious stones, bought it—in spite of its sinister reputation—for a fabulous sum, from

a syndicate of Paris diamond-merchants. It is, like the famous Hope diamond, one of the reputed "unlucky" stones.

Personally I am not superstitious, and am no believer in the power of any inanimate object, be it a jewel or an Egyptian mummy, to bring ill-luck to its possessor.

And those undisputed cases of articles proving "unlucky" to a series of owners, I regard as coincidences. And coincidence is a far commoner phenomenon than the ignorant and thoughtless are disposed to admit.

Certainly, this diamond, The Unsetting Sun, had been the property of quite a number of remarkably unfortunate kings and queens, princes, potentates and powers, as well as private individuals; and admittedly, it is true that my grandfather, known in Wall Street, in "big business," and among his friends, as "Lucky St. Clair" up to the time of his acquiring The Unsetting Sun, came to be known as "Unlucky St. Clair" soon afterwards and thenceforth.

His wife was burnt to death in a disastrous fire which destroyed his marvellous home and its priceless contents, and he died a comparatively poor man—poor though still the proprietor of The Unsetting Sun, which nothing would induce him to sell. This was partly due to his stubbornness and his courageous refusal to be

beaten by "the luck of The Unsetting Sun," and partly due to the fact that, save for this one stone, he had sold his entire collection of gems, in a vain endeavour to stem the tide of his losses, and to stay the avalanche of ruin that almost overwhelmed him.

He left the diamond to my father, on condition that he never sold it, but bequeathed it to his son on like terms, and he to his son and so on, in perpetuity.

My father was not what could be called an unlucky man, but, shortly after inheriting The Unsetting Sun, my mother, whom he adored, was killed in that terrible railway accident when a train and the bridge it was crossing were together blown into the canyon below.

And here was I, again, by no means a generally unlucky man, losing my wife in turn, and, more tragically, my daughter, soon after coming into possession of the stone.

As I have said, I am not a superstitious man, but I would not give The Unsetting Sun to one whom I loved. If Rosemary were alive I would not bequeath it to her.

And it is possible that it was with the faintest sensation of grim satisfaction that I put the diamond and its case into a strong wooden box and mailed it to the indicated address.

Perhaps the new owner, or owners, of The Unsetting Sun would—quite apart from any-

thing that I might do—live to regret the fact that they had acquired it!

That same day I set out in my fastest car, to get action with my bankers and the first big diamond-merchant with whom I could make contact.

Within a fortnight I had despatched, to the other address, a parcel of one hundred beautiful first-water diamonds, not one of which was worth less, in the open market, than ten thousand dollars.

Eleven days later I received a letter, bearing some village post-mark, informing me that my child would be found waiting for me, three days hence, at a house in Chicago, the address of which was given.

The letter went on to say that the sooner I went there *after* that date, the better for the child; and the greater secrecy that I observed, the greater the probability of my success. Communication with the police would be dangerous to me and, in any case, futile, for the writer would be out of the country by the time this letter reached me.

§ 2

I will not dwell overmuch on this part of my story, for it will make painful reading, to say nothing of the pain of the telling, which, even after this lapse of years, makes me tremble from head to foot now, as I sit here and write . . .

The address proved to be that of an empty house, old dilapidated, and derelict, standing alone in a somewhat unfrequented part of the outskirts of the town, a hideous and sinister house, long abandoned and empty—empty save for the fact that, locked in a small, bare, and filthy upstairs room, a child lay on the foul floor beneath a grimy window situated beyond her reach.

Dirty, emaciated, uncombed, unwashed, untended, and clad in horrible second-hand or twenty-second-hand clothing, originally made for a child much bigger than she, there lay what at first I could not believe to be my daughter.

What she had gone through in those awful weeks, I was never to know; but the last, and possibly the least, of the things that my little Rosemary had suffered, was very nearly three days' solitary confinement, night and day, in that filthy room of that horrible empty house.

I myself have endured solitary confinement, and know what that torture was to me, a strong man. Who can conceive what it was to a delicate child, in circumstances such as those?

I have suffered a good deal, one way and another, in my time—but I think that in that place I received my sorrow's crown of sorrows when I discovered that Rosemary did not know me. Her mind had given way under what she had suffered, and my little girl was

not only a physical wreck, but was completely insane.

Do you wonder that I became almost insane myself, and that punishment and vengeance became an *idée fixe* and an obsession, from that hour?

Do you wonder that I came to regard it as an almost sacred duty?

With the utmost speed I took Rosemary to the house of the nearest doctor, and thence to that of the man who is probably the greatest neurologist and physician in the whole of the United States of America.

I feel certain that no human being could have done more for my little girl than he did, and he hardly left her side until she died. I did not leave her once. It was terrible—agonising beyond words—for she had suffered active and actual cruelty from one of the gang called "Jimmy" . . . She screamed his name in a horror of fear—shrieked and screamed to her father to come and save her from him . . .

Jimmy!

I have never ceased to be thankful that I refused to move from her bedside, for, just before she died, she recovered consciousness and sanity for a few minutes, just long enough to say "I knew you'd come, Daddy," and to smile at me.

And then she died, and all that was best in me died too, and I became a living vengeance,

a mono-maniac, with but one thought, one idea, one purpose.

Jimmy! . . .

"Vengeance is mine," I said, and set about devoting my life to it.

First I realised the large property that remained to me, and, having turned it all into cash, deposited it at my Bank.

I then elaborately set about the business of disappearing—and giving my quarry a false sense of security—by means of widely-spread reports of my apparent suicide. My hat, my overcoat and my last letter, the suicide's letter of farewell, were found in my motor-car on the bank of the swift and deep river that ran near my house, which I had recently vacated, sold and left for ever.

I was completely successful.

The erstwhile millionaire, John Dacre Waye Vanderleur St. Clair, disappeared absolutely from human ken, and in the underworld of Chicago, unobtrusively appeared a somewhat mysterious recruit in the upper—or wealthier—ranks of crookdom, a bearded, flash, monied rascal, one of whose aliases was John Waye . . .

Before long, I was something of a figure in the underworld of Chicago, and a friend and protégé of "Uncle" himself.

Of this amazing man, Uncle, more anon.

Suffice it here to say that it was the Chief of Police at Chicago who had told me about him in the days when I was Vanderleur St. Clair, the millionaire, moving heaven and earth and the police and detective agencies of America, in search of a kidnapped daughter.

The Chief of Police, who knew as much as any honest man alive about crooks and their ways, had told me that, sooner or later, "Uncle" was bound to know something—and probably everything—about the business, adding the caution that it would be perfectly hopeless and useless for me, or for himself either for that matter, to approach Uncle direct.

He promised, however, to put one of his best men on the whole-time job of hanging around Uncle's speak-easy—which was in reality nothing more nor less than a Crooks' Club—with open ears.

Through the good offices of an excellent crook whom I had employed before I disappeared—and who, in the bearded ruffian that now sought him out, did not recognise his erstwhile employer—I steadily enlarged my circle of undesirable but desired acquaintance, and sedulously explored this new world—or underworld.

It was a horrible life.

I loathed every hour of it, and nothing but my fanatical yearning for vengeance enabled me to endure it.

How I hated those evil men and women, those pests, parasites, and preyers on Society; and how eagerly I made their acquaintance, sought their company, and followed up each new friendship, "dulling my palm with entertainment of each new-hatch'd, new-fledg'd comrade."

They made my soul sick, and hope deferred made my heart sick.

From time to time, when I heard some male or female scoundrel narrating the details—or personally boasting—of some big swindle, robbery, blackmail, or kidnapping, hope would revive, and I would follow up the clue.

Sometimes it was literally and physically a case of following, when I heard of some gang operating in New York, or elsewhere, in a line of business, the details of which seemed to suggest some resemblance to the methods of the gang who had victimised me and killed my child.

Once established and accepted at Uncle's, I learned a very great deal, and it was there, one night, that I heard a slightly intoxicated female bemoaning, in maudlin and rambling manner, the long absence of her partner in joy and crime, at S——, where he and his pals were on to a fine, but delicate, thing in blackmail, combined with a kidnapping which meant a fat wad either by ransom or white slavery.

To S—— forthwith I went.

CHAPTER II

CAN a diamond—or any other inanimate object be "unlucky?"

I suppose it would be quite understandable, and possibly excusable, if I had, after all, become more or less superstitious with regard to the "Curse" of The Unsetting Sun, or rather the Luck—always ill-luck—of this stone, one of the world's greatest diamonds.

However genuinely one might laugh at the idea of there being any sort of connection between my father's possession of The Unsetting Sun, and the terrible death of his wife; or between my possession of it, and my loss of my wife, it is undeniable that, had I never owned the famous jewel, Rosemary would not have been kidnapped.

And again, had it never been mine, that which now happened to me—quite early in my new career—would never have occurred, for I should never have gone to S——, on the trail of Rosemary's murderers . . .

Tramping the streets of that city, late one night, going from one crooks' haunt to another

—making discreet enquiries, in each, as to the whereabouts and activities of the gang whom I was tracking there—I was suddenly aware of a man who, turning a corner, sped toward me, running swiftly and silently at top speed, in "sneakers" or rubber-soled shoes.

Seeing me, he dashed across the road and continued his headlong flight.

It is curious to think that this unknown man, whom I only saw for a few seconds, and whose face I never saw at all, changed the whole course of my life.

Turning the corner round which he had just come, I dismissed him from my thoughts and went on my way, until, beneath a lamp-post, I was reminded of him by the sight of an open leather case—a pocket-book or money-wallet.

Picking it up, I saw that it was an article of good quality, the sort of thing in which a wealthy man might carry bills of the larger denominations. It was empty, and I jumped to the conclusion that it had been emptied, a minute before, by the swift and silent runner as he ran. Holding it in my hand, I looked up and down the long, silent, and deserted street and then walked on.

What should I do with the thing? Throw it away? Keep it in case I read or heard something that might give me a clue to its ownership?

Suddenly, with a sense of shock and a quick-

ening pulse, I saw, lying beneath the next lamp-post, the huddled form of a man. Hurrying forward and kneeling by his side, I found that he was elderly, very well-dressed (in evening clothes)—and apparently dead. His opera hat lay in the gutter and from the back of his head a little stream of blood had flowed and trickled.

Raising his head and shoulders from the ground, to make what examination I could, and to see if it were possible to render any immediate first aid, I decided that he was quite dead. His heart had ceased to beat, he did not breathe, and his upturned eyes were fixed and glazed.

Lowering the body to the pavement again, I picked up the wallet from where I had laid it down. Perhaps it might contain a name and address. If so, I felt pretty certain they would be the name and address of the dead man.

As, kneeling beside the body, I searched the pocket-book, I was startled, shocked, almost paralysed, by a tremendous blow which, falling upon my left shoulder close to the neck and sending me sprawling on my face, seemed to knock the breath from my body and thought from my brain . . .

The thief? . . .

Had he returned to the scene of this robbery-with-violence—this murder?

Returned in search of further loot . . . to

see whether his victim were dead or not . . . to recover something incriminating that he had dropped ?

No, he wouldn't be likely to come back . . .

Or had he perhaps seen me kneeling by the body, and, fearing that I had seen sufficient of him to be able to identify him, had returned to silence me ? " Dead men tell no tales " is a favourite aphorism of the strong-arm thug and similar type of crook.

But no, I had turned a corner since he had passed me.

Of course he might have stopped, looked back, and seen me turn the corner in the direction of the spot where his victim lay, and might have followed to see what I did.

Most improbable though . . .

Might he have stopped, turned about, and followed me with a view to attacking and robbing me as he had robbed this unfortunate old man ?

Very improbable again, as I certainly did not look like a person who might be worth robbing —dressed as I was for the part that I was playing.

These thoughts flashed through my mind as, for a second or two, I lay on my face breathless and bewildered, expecting another blow—this time to be more successfully aimed at the back of my skull.

Pulling myself together, I rose to my knees, and, turning, got to my feet to face—a policeman—who, club in hand, stood menacingly glaring, his other hand resting on the butt of the pistol that protruded from its opened holster.

"Put 'em up," he growled, "and . . ."

I put one up, anyhow, like lightning, straight from my hip to the point of his jaw, with all my strength and weight behind it; and even as the tremendous blow went home, I realised that in my sudden and justifiable wrath, I had done the maddest thing imaginable, committed the most foolish act of my life.

Caught red-handed—and both my hands were red with the blood of the man whom I had tried to help—in the very act of examining the victim's pocket-case, I had resisted arrest and violently assaulted a policeman in the execution of his duty.

No judge would for one moment believe my story that the policeman, creeping up in rubber-shod boots, had struck me first, struck me down without a word.

Nor, even if the policeman had admitted it, would he have been severely blamed for adopting that somewhat arbitrary method of arresting what he supposed to be a dangerous and murderous highway-robber, caught in the very act of rifling the body of his victim, of examining

with wet blood-stained hands the purse he had so violently and brutally stolen.

No. I had made very bad into far, far worse ; by my rashness and folly I had made an awkward position into one just about as dangerous as it could be. Had I meekly accepted the situation, I might possibly have been able to prove that I was not the thief and murderer, or, failing that, I might perhaps have been given the benefit of the doubt—at any rate, to the extent of a lighter sentence.

But in the most unfortunate and suspicious circumstances in the world, I had acted in the worst possible way—by my own act confirming the suspicions.

Why should an innocent man resist arrest, and with such desperate violence ?

Anyhow, innocent of robbery-with-violence or not, I was now quite undeniably guilty of a most serious and heavily-punishable offence against the law.

I had earned a prison sentence, and I should certainly get it.

And my blood boiled at the thought that I had been betrayed by this ruffianly policeman's arbitrary, inexcusable and illegal violence into doing, however justifiably, that which would send me to prison, and so interfere with my quest, my life's-business, of tracking down and punishing Rosemary's murderers.

My blood boiled, and, as the policeman drew his pistol, I struck again, and struck with all my strength and skill; and even as I did so, again blamed myself for what I was doing.

But now, reason for once applauded impulse, and told me that if I could disable the man and get away, I might yet escape the net in which fate and my folly had enmeshed me.

Marvellous is the swiftness of thought. All this had flashed through my mind in a second—in the time it takes to deliver a couple of swift blows.

My first had sent the policeman staggering back, probably a little dazed and shaken.

My second knocked him down, but not out.

Paradoxically he was handicapped by being armed, for, had he come at me with his fists, I should probably have been the sooner at his mercy, inasmuch as he was very much bigger and, no doubt, far stronger than I.

But I have boxed all my life: the clenched fist travels infinitely quicker than the hand that grasps a club or pistol: and I had delivered a smashing blow while my opponent had raised his club above his head.

I had delivered another while he drew and raised his pistol.

I now rushed, and kicked with all my strength—not at the prostrate man's head or body, as the genuine crook would have done, but at the

hand that grasped the pistol. This I sent flying, and, as the policeman scrambled swiftly to his feet, I aimed another blow at the point of his jaw. This he partly dodged, received it on his forehead, caught me a splendid clip with his left, and swung up his club to brain me as I staggered.

Ducking, I sprang in, flung my arms about him, and heavily we fell together to the ground.

Here we fought desperately, struggling, rolling, punching, kicking, each trying to get above the other.

Suddenly by a kind of mutual consent, we released holds and scrambled to our feet. Instantly I struck, and again the policeman was at a disadvantage entirely due to the fact that he was armed—for he thought far more about getting hold of the club that was dangling from his wrist than of parrying or dodging my blows. He knew, and I knew, that once he could hit me fairly on the head with that long and heavy night-stick, the fight would be ended.

Again I got in a heavy blow before the club whirled up, and I felt that one such another would leave me free to run for dear life, without fear of pursuit. Then the club fell, and, as it did so, I raised my almost useless left arm to protect my head while I delivered a tremendous drive that was to finish the fight.

Almost simultaneously we struck, and, as my left arm broke, so did the policeman's prognathous jaw. As I staggered back, he dropped without a sound, and lay like a sack of flour, inert and motionless.

Drawing a deep breath, I stepped back, turned and sprinted, thankful beyond measure that no sound of following footsteps came. But my thankfulness was premature.

Scarcely was I well into my stride, and hardly had I run a dozen yards, before there was a loud bang.

A heavy blow struck my leg and I stumbled.

Another bang and a searing, burning, tearing pain passed through my chest, and I fell to the ground.

Again, a third bang, and I felt as though a sledge-hammer had hit me on the head.

The policeman had won after all, won by a legitimate feint. His collapse had been a fake.

Guessing that I would instantly run, he had shammed defeat, fallen to the ground, and lain still until my back was turned. He had then sprung to where the pistol lay, and had shot me thrice within thirty yards of the spot whence I had started to run.

I had had no compunction whatsoever about fighting him and hitting him as hard and as often as I could, in return for the unfair and cowardly blow he had struck me with his club

while I knelt with my back turned to him; and he, I'm sorry to say, now had equally little compunction about kicking me on the head twice, with all his strength, as I lay wounded, gasping and bleeding upon the ground.

"You make a move," he growled, "and I'll give you another bullet just where it'll do you most good, Mr. Thug."

I made no reply, for I was fast losing consciousness, and believed that I was dying—dying in impotent wrath and rage and in bitter anger at the thought that Rosemary's murderer would now go unpunished.

I have no clear recollection of anything else that happened that night, but have a dim remembrance of being roughly seized by the collar, dragged along the ground, and dropped beneath the lamp-post beside the body of the murdered man.

CHAPTER III

I HAVE no profoundly original or interesting views to offer on the subject of American prisons and prison-life. Prisons are unpleasant places—and criminals are unpleasant people. They are the enemies of Society—and Society, rightly, protects itself against them.

It is a terrible thing that murderers should be murdered, but I am certain, and I have a right to an opinion on the subject, that the death penalty is a great deterrent—the greatest deterrent that could be devised.

It is also a terrible thing that man should shut his fellow-man away from the light of the sun and from the very air itself—(for there is no air in a prison, only the stench of the disinfectants that put a specious gloss of health and hygiene upon what is unhealthy and unwholesome)—but I have yet to learn of any other method of segregating the human wolves that prey upon Society.

No, as far as the criminal is concerned, I am no sentimentalist, and I feel nothing but anger and contempt toward those—generally ex-con-

victs themselves—who write as though the only low, base, vile and criminal people about a prison are the warders and the staff themselves; while every convict in the place is a gentle, kindly, misjudged creature, whose very worst deed has been a boyish prank due to the exuberance of his high bright spirits.

No; ninety-five per cent of men in prison are where they ought to be; and those people whose sympathy is not absorbed in their own environment, but overflows in other and wider channels, might, when including this aspect of human misery, do better to direct it toward the victims of the criminals rather than to the criminals themselves.

This is not to say that there are not many men of many virtues in prison. I liked, and indeed admired some of my fellow-convicts, but the fact remains that they had done dreadful things, and, in the majority of cases, boasted of them, and hoped to do more.

No, again.

Crime is crime; and punishment is punishment; and although I was myself an innocent man—almost certainly the only one among all those hundreds—I have, in spite of my close-up view of them, nothing to say against capital punishment and the prison system—provided always that the one is as merciful as possible, and the other aims at improve-

ment, and the releasing of a better man than it received.

What I do complain of, is the abuse of the system, abuses wherein deliberate cruelty; insanitary conditions; the herding of the novice-in-crime with the hardened, abandoned and habitual villain; or actual danger to life and limb, such as by fire, play their dreadful part.

I have no complaint to make of my treatment in San Paolo Gaol, and had I been the murderous thug that I was supposed to be, I should have got nothing more than I deserved.

§ 2

Being innocent, and having, if that be possible, even more need and desire than most men, to remain free and unfettered to carry out the work to which I had dedicated my life, my lot was a hard one, and if any prisoner in San Paolo Gaol had reason for complaint—and they complained unceasingly—it was surely I.

It was probably a mercy, a mercy in strange guise, that my head was badly damaged. Either the kick, the blow from the club, or the bullet, aided no doubt by lack of proper attention, had injured my brain and affected my mind.

I lived in a dream, a nightmare, and it was not until I had been in prison for some time

that my mind began to clear, and I emerged from this blanketing mental fog into the clear light of reason—and realisation of the gloomy half-light of prison.

Obviously, during the weeks and months that had elapsed between the night of my arrest and the day of my final full awakening to life and to reality, I must have eaten and drunk, lain down and risen up, slept and awakened, answered questions after a fashion, and, in some sort, conducted myself as a sane and sufficiently normal human being.

Otherwise I should have found myself in the State Criminal Lunatic Asylum, instead of the Penitentiary.

But I have no clear and coherent recollection of either of the two trials that I underwent, nor of my life in the local gaol before I was finally sentenced and committed to the San Paolo prison—for life.

Glimpses and memories of isolated incidents stand out sharply in my mind, just as do fragments of a dream whereof the main story as a whole, has vanished.

I remember sending a despairing message to "Uncle," telling him that I would make him rich for life if he would use his powerful political influence to help me to get off, or to help me to escape if I were sentenced . . .

I remember the face of a woman who smiled

kindly at me—when she saw I was handcuffed—in the train that took me to my trial . . .

I remember my first sight of the prison, and that this was of its cemetery . . . a hideous and terrible potter's field of bare brown earth, unrelieved by a single blade or leaf of green—fertile earth, whose sole perennial crop was black-numbered boards which grew, row upon row, in stark monotonous array, each marking the last resting-place of a man who had died in gaol, and been denied, even in death, a name.

I had arrived at San Paolo station in a dream-train, and thence driven in a dream-stage, dilapidated, ricketty and filthy; and of the journey I remember nothing else save that there were handcuffs upon my wrists and that I was accompanied by a man who, from time to time, took from the side-pocket of his coat, a short, heavy revolver whereof he would fondly smell the muzzle as though it had been a rose.

With economy of speech and a jerk of his spatulate thumb, this gentleman bade me descend at the gate of the prison, which vast building, as I noted, stood alone and isolated in that bare and sun-baked countryside.

A small door in this main entrance-gate being opened, we entered the gate-house—be-

tween which and the prison proper there were other great gates. Here my custodian reluctantly relinquished his revolver, giving it into the charge of the gate-keeper who at once locked it in a drawer of his desk.

One of the two, I forget which, then removed the handcuffs from my wrists, opened a door in the great gates opposite to those by which we had entered, and led me across the prison yard into a gloomy stone room wherein I was frisked and mugged—in other words, searched and photographed.

Thence I was taken to what was called a bath-room, and, under the doubtless competent direction and scrutiny of a negro, I had to strip and bathe.

I shall never forget that bath. I do not know, but I believe, it was the first bath I had had for months; and the negro's exhortations to thoroughness were superfluous. I believe that my negro custodian and superior had more difficulty in getting me out of that bath than in getting me into it. Indeed I seem to remember his extricating me by seizing my head and hauling mightily.

I was then, although stripped, subjected to the indignities of further search, presumably lest I had lethal weapons concealed in my mouth, my ears, between my toes, or elsewhere.

Satisfied on this point, the negro literally

threw at my head a bundle, and expressed a hope that I should find everything to my liking and as I had ordered it—snappy, smart, well-fitting and fashionable.

I found the bundle to consist of rough coarse underclothing and a top-shirt or blouse of white canvas with horizontal black stripes, and a coat and trousers of similar material with black stripes that were perpendicular.

Unto these things were added a pair of large and shapeless shoes.

I being now fully dressed, my negro master bade me "step on it" and move like I was alive, but, in spite of this apparent urgency, found time to taunt me upon my appearance and to inform me that sure god-awful as I might feel, I couldn't feel one half as god-awful as I looked—yet nevertheless he was now going to make me look ten times more god-awful still.

In pursuance of the fulfilment of this promise, he now conducted me to the barber's shop, a cell containing a chair, a man, and a pair of clippers.

Roughly and clumsily this man removed the hair from my head until my scalp was bald, save for its bristles, and my negro guardian was justified of his promise.

I felt no regret whatever, when I left the latter's charge, for he was a huge repulsive

brute with a hare-lip and a bad skin-disease, no manners, no morals, and no roof to his mouth.

He looked vile, spoke vilely, and undeniably he smelt vilely. Perhaps it was for these reasons that he remained in my memory when I forgot so many, and so much.

And now registered, searched, bathed, clothed and shorn, I was given the book of the words, or rather rules, which were many, and a card which bore the legend :

" This is to certify that the bearer, No. 46783, *is at present in possession of full privileges, entitled to write letters and receive visitors under the rules, to take part in any organised games and attend prison concerts."*

The rules, I saw, consisted mainly of counsels of perfection, exhortations to the meekest obedience, and prohibition of smuggling tobacco, drugs, sugar, and other contraband into the prison, and to taking the utmost care of all State property.

The next thing I remember was being taken by a guard down a long, dark, though whitewashed, corridor, and being shown into a kind of reception-room or clearing-house for in-coming convicts.

This room, or huge cell, was, as I afterwards learned, known, for some inexplicable reason, as The Fort. It was a place that I

was to see again under more dramatic circumstances.

Here I was glad to sit down upon a bench, for, in addition to the pain in my head, I felt extremely ill, an illness mental and spiritual in origin, that had come upon me as I traversed that dark corridor, smelt the authentic dreadful prison smell—compounded of horrors and disinfectant—and heard the dreadful prison sounds.

These latter, I afterwards discovered, proceeded from the cells of men who had gone mad in prison, and knew not what they did.

These men were not as yet genuine lunatics, and candidates for the criminal asylum, but consisted largely of two classes—those who, on the one hand, were creatures of weaker fibre who had broken down under the monotony, hardship, and inevitable cruelty of the system; and on the other, men of terrible strength of character, incorrigible breakers of the prison-law, ferocious fighters against discipline, prison demons who had gone mad under the punishments they had brought upon themselves, punishments such as man-handling, whipping, starvation, stringing-up, the strait-waistcoat, and solitary confinement in pitch-black darkness.

As I sat in that ill-lit, cold and dirty room, I wondered how long it would be before I

joined them in Nut-House Alley, as that corridor of madmen's cells was called.

I remember that, as I sat there, hours later, a man in convict dress, different from my own, entered, carrying a plate of bread and molasses and a can of water. I glanced at the food and shuddered, and the man disappeared, taking it with him.

Later, more convicts were brought to this room, old men, middle-aged men, young men, boys, negroes and a Chinese. With them came a guard who seated himself on a chair on a platform and gazed at nothing, which included us.

We sat about, suppressing yawns, fidgetting, half-dead of ennui, anxiety, misery and boredom. For hours we sat. For nightless days and weeks and months and years we seemed to sit in a cowed silence broken only by the buzzing of a fly, until I broke down and screamed aloud; screamed my soul out, until in panic-terror, staring around me and at the guard, I found that my screams were silent . . .

And here I lapsed back into the state of semi-coma in which I had been since my head was injured, and I remembered very little more until, one day, I realised that it was I, John Dacre Waye Vanderleur St. Clair who was sitting in a prison cell reading a Bible, and had just read the words:

"'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' saith the Lord."

Of course, *vengeance.*

I rose and paced my cell, eight feet by four by seven.

Vengeance. I was Vengeance.

"'Vengeance is Mine,' saith the Lord." Very well, then, I was the Lord's Vengeance. God's own. Dedicated to vengeance.

"'Vengeance is Mine,' saith the Lord. 'I will repay.'"

Through me, the Lord would repay. I was His instrument . . . His instrument of vengeance, whereby, and through whom, He would repay. And who, in all this world a fitter instrument?

The Lord and I would work together, I helping Him, He helping me.

Helping me.

But Heaven helps those who help themselves, and I must fight this blight, this coma, this dreadful paralysis of decay and death of the mind, the spirit and the soul.

I must fight, tooth and nail, against inertia and acceptance of my fate. Inch by inch I must struggle upward lest, not merely standing still, but, imperceptibly at first and swiftly later, I begin the facile descent of the steep and slippery path that leads men down to that terrible Nut-House Alley and destruction.

From that hour, my periods of complete sanity and sense grew longer and more frequent, and my memories of that time are more numerous and clearer.

Nevertheless, I remember but little.

Men, I know, have written whole volumes telling of their lives in prison. I could with difficulty fill a chapter. To me it was, and is, an evil dream, and I could not write a volume about a dream.

Incidents and details of my escape, like those of my entry into prison, I remember plainly enough. Between, stretches a desert of time, featureless and monotonous as a desert always is.

A few people, incidents and scenes connected with that period I still remember, but for the most part all is monotony, blurred and drear and blank.

CHAPTER IV

I SUPPOSE I should, after all, have gone mad in gaol, or have committed suicide, but that I had some justification for the hope that is said to spring eternal in the human breast.

It has been my experience that money will do anything, and will buy anything, except the few things worth having, such as love, friendship, health, and peace of mind.

It was not long after my return to clarity of mind that I received a message by the underground or "grape-vine" route:

"Guard Murphy markets. Trusty Moroff finks."

This cryptic information filled me with joy, for it meant that a guard whom I will call Murphy was in the habit of augmenting his exiguous income by "obliging" prisoners for a consideration, and might be expected to consider propositions—ranging from the introduction of tobacco, chocolate, files, and weapons—to the smuggling of letters, carrying of information, and even assisting attempts at escape.

To making the fullest use of the services of such a man, I had not the slightest objection, though I should greatly have disliked, and probably rejected, any scheme for the corruption of an upright public servant who had always done his job honestly.

If Guard Murphy were in the habit of taking risks for gain, he should certainly take them on my account.

One day, a big husky fellow with a cruel face, a tight mouth, and a hard eye, whispered to me from the corner of a scarce-opening lip:

"Oi'm Guard Murphy. Look in yer Boible to-night," and passed on.

When alone in my cell at six-thirty that evening, it was with almost trembling fingers that I took the Book from its shelf and searched it.

Near the middle I found a double sheet of thin tissue-paper covered with typescript. It was a message obviously from "Uncle," of whom more anon, telling me that when Guard Murphy came and said one word to me, that word would be the name of the place where a high-powered motor-car was, and always would be, waiting for me.

I set to work, planned and plotted, night and day, sent letters to Uncle and received answers.

With Guard Murphy, I had brief and occasional—but pregnant—speech.

One day I decided that I was ready, and

that very night I would put my fortune to the test.

And I felt that I should succeed.

Was I not Vengeance? God's Vengeance.

His own appointed instrument.

"I will repay."

I, perhaps naturally in such circumstances, lost sight of the fact that I was a self-appointed instrument, and, while quoting "Vengeance is Mine," forgot another truth, Man proposes—and God disposes . . .

§ 2

I am not the only man who has escaped from an American prison, but I am probably the only convict who has ever been in whole and sole control of one—and had it absolutely at his mercy and disposal.

For that is exactly what happened, and, as a matter of actual fact, it was amazingly easy and simple.

And this is the plain unvarnished tale and truth of what took place.

At ten o'clock at night, the guard who had introduced himself to me as Murphy, passed my cell door and heard the appalling and heart-rending groans that he expected to hear. Supposing (as he stated, in evidence, later) that the occupant of the cell had attempted suicide

or had been taken ill and was dying, he promptly unlocked the door and stepped inside.

Instantly the muzzle of an automatic pistol appeared in front of his face and a grim deadly voice said :

" Put 'em up."

As he did so—a thing that ninety-nine guards out of a hundred, so placed, would do—the voice continued :

" Here's where I die—after I've killed you —or else I make my get-away. Strip ! ", and Guard Murphy pretended that he was trapped, and that unless he instantly and implicitly obeyed every order of this desperate criminal, he would be a dead man. Should he refuse to comply, or make a single wrong move, the convict would shoot him and then wait to see whether the shot were heard. If so, and other guards came running, the desperado would " shoot it out " with them, and either die fighting or make a break for liberty armed with another pistol and their keys.

" Quick," I growled. " Cap, tunic, trousers, boots, belt, everything . . . If I get clear you'll never need to work again."

" I'm trusting ye, me bhoy," whispered Guard Murphy, " and annyhow ye got the bulge on me . . . It's a cinch . . ."

" I'm trusting you too, Murphy," I said, " but as soon as you've stripped, turn your

back to me and cross your wrists behind you. I shall only want one hand and my teeth for the job, and my other hand will be holding the gun against your liver . . ."

In about three minutes, Guard Murphy's uniform, boots, cap and belt were on the floor of the cell, and his hands were bound together behind him with my piece of wire, and I could now lay the pistol aside.

I felt pretty certain he would not risk shouting for help, if he changed his mind at the last moment, and decided not to go through with it.

"Lie down," I ordered, and in another minute his feet were tied together.

"Gag me before ye go, for the love of Mike," he whispered.

"I'm going to," I replied, "and perhaps I'll put you to sleep with a bash on the head or a kick on the point of the jaw . . . Make the job look more natural."

"Sure now, there's no call for ye to *over*-act yer part, honest man," grinned Murphy.

Having gagged him, and so made certain that there was nothing more to fear from him, I dressed myself as a guard, complete in every detail, and, taking his keys, opened the door, stepped out into the corridor, and locked the door behind me.

I was free—inside the prison.

And if I acted with courage and resource

and all went well with my plan ; and if every man whom I surprised re-acted correctly to my suddenly presented pistol, there was a chance that I should be free outside it too.

Assuming the attitude, pace and demeanour of a guard on duty, I tramped down the corridor toward the watchman who, as I knew, would be on duty outside the big common-cell known for some reason as "The Fort." This was a one-room prison in itself, and would accommodate a score or more of men at least. Most convicts spent their first few nights in this dungeon, before being assigned to cells.

If the watchman took no notice of me, as was quite likely in that dim light, I would pass on, though I did not altogether like the idea of having an enemy behind me.

Suppose he were a quick-witted man, saw there was something wrong, took apparently no notice of me until I had passed, and then covered me with his automatic, or shot me down without a word ?

I must risk it. The whole scheme was one big risk . . .

As I passed him the watchman looked up.

"Say, Patsy," he said, and then his eyes and mouth opened wider. "What the . . ."

"Stick 'em up!" I growled. "Quick," and as the big automatic prodded his stomach his hands shot up as high as he could put them.

I took his pistol from its holster.

"Unlock the door and get inside, quick," I said, "and be thankful . . ."

The watchman opened that four-inch iron door more quickly than usual, and went into The Fort as though it was his home. It was —for quite a little while, too.

Like Guard Murphy, he was safely out of action until someone other than myself was in possession of the big key which I turned and withdrew from the lock. With a smile, I thought of the watchman explaining his presence to whatever convicts might also be in The Fort.

It occurred to me, at that moment, and for the first time, that the watchman had done me splendid service by recognising me and causing me to "stick him up" and drive him into the cell, for he had given me a brilliant idea and had provided a perfect solution of the greater part of my problem.

Whither the watchman had gone his comrades should go—every warder, guard, watchman, trusty, or other official who recognised me or showed suspicion.

That big cell, I realised, had no windows in the ordinary sense of the word, only some small apertures glazed with the thickest opaque glass, in one wall, some ten or twelve feet from the ground.

There would be no audible cry for help from The Fort.

Proceeding on my way toward the Warden's Office, I met a "trusty" (a trusted convict endowed with certain privileges and responsibilities), but he passed me, with lowered eyes and without a glance.

Emerging into the blessed fresh air of the dark night, I marched boldly across the "Meadow," as we called the bare, bleak, inner quadrangle which was the convicts' exercise-ground, to where a guard stood sentinel beneath a lamp.

As I approached him at an angle, whistling an Irish air which was a favourite with Murphy, I got within arm's length of the sentry without his taking the slightest notice of me, and, with a lightning grab, I disarmed him, at the same time growling, with as sinister a scowl as I could achieve:

"Hands up! . . . Quick!"

Up went the guard's hands, for life was as dear to him as to most of us, and he knew only too well that a desperate escaping convict would shoot a guard with as little compunction as he would a snake.

"About turn!" I said, "and if you shout, you'll be the first to die."

"I sure ain't taking any chances," whispered the guard as he turned about.

"Then march to The Fort, quick!" I said,

and prodded him in the small of his back with the muzzle of his own automatic, a class of weapon of which I was suffering from a plethora —this making my fourth.

Within a minute I had shepherded my victim, at the pistol's point, to the door, and made him open it and enter.

The look of disappointment on the imprisoned watchman's face as he saw two levelled automatics and the guard, instead of release, was ludicrous.

"Don't either of you be near the door, next time it opens," I said. "There's going to be some shooting, and I may get mad and make a real killing."

The door closed gently, and again I locked it and withdrew the key.

Thrice I repeated this process, and each time the proceedings passed off without a hitch.

It was unbelievably easy—owing of course to the fact that, being in the complete uniform of a guard, I was able to present a pistol at the head or stomach of my victim before he had the faintest idea of anything being wrong.

It was of pleasing interest to me to notice that, on each occasion, the heavy iron door of The Fort opened upon silence and apparent emptiness.

The men within knew that, certainly two, and probably four, would be killed before their

concerted rush at the narrow doorway could thrust aside the entering victim and enable them to get at me.

It was in a dream-like condition, almost a state of exaltation, that I, coolly, swiftly, and in business-like manner, went about my affair until, one by one, I had captured every single guard inside the prison.

It was, of course, my great good-fortune and a weakness in the prison system of vigilance, that, in no case, was one guard, watchman, or sentry, in actual sight of another. But for this, even with my perfect disguise, I could hardly have succeeded.

Having, in an amazingly short space of time, safely disposed of all the inner guards, I now turned to the more difficult and dangerous task of dealing with the Warden's Office staff—if any were still on duty—and the outer guard at the prison gates.

Tramping heavily, whistling blithely, and jangling my keys, I marched up to the door of the office, threw it open, tramped in, with all the assurance of the Warden himself, closed the door, and saw that the only occupant of the room was the prison book-keeper—who looked up from his work and stared at me in amazement.

He stared harder, with yet more amazement, as a big automatic appeared a foot from his

face, and the unknown guard gave the peremptory order.

"Signal the outer guard to open the prison gates!"

He was a good boy, that book-keeper—and I have sent him a far bigger sum of money than I gave Guard Murphy.

"You win," he smiled, rose from his chair, came round the desk, made as if to pass me, suddenly struck the levelled pistol from my hand, and sprang on me like a tiger. He was strong too, and very wiry, though slight, and he fought like a bear-cat.

But he was fighting for his duty, his conscience and his job, whereas I was fighting for my life and for my life-work—the punishment of Rosemary's murderers—and, before long, I was on top, with my knee on his chest, my hands like a vice on his throat.

When his face was beginning to turn purple, and his eyes starting from his head, I suddenly released my grip with one hand, drew another pistol from my pocket, and held it to his face.

"Do we both die?" I growled.

"No," he wheezed. "You win."

"Get up and give the signal to the outer guard at the gates," I ordered.

Staggering to his feet, the clerk went over to the bell-pull, two pistols threatening him from behind.

I certainly wasn't going to shoot him, but he didn't know that. And he did know that he couldn't knock both pistols aside, held as they were, one pointing at his stomach and one at his head.

"Don't give the wrong signal," I said, "unless you're really tired of life."

"No," he promised. "I'll sure give the right signal."

But I saw a triumphant thought flash through his mind. I literally saw it in his eyes, perhaps because I was so keyed up, so exalted, with every sense so preternaturally acute.

This boy was fine—game and clever and honest. He'd give the signal all-right, and run no risk, but he'd got something up his sleeve. So had I—an iron fist.

I guessed exactly what his scheme was.

He would give the signal, and, as soon as the inner gate was opened, and I marched out of the room to escape, he would give the alarm to the guard at the gate when I was half-way there.

This would allow the guard time to pull his gun and close the gate, while the clerk himself rushed to ring the general-alarm bell.

"I'll give the right signal," he answered me, and did so.

As he turned to me with a smile, I swiftly, with all my strength and the utmost reluctance,

struck him a crashing blow on the point of the jaw with my right fist, in which I held the heavy pistol by the middle, as one does a dumb-bell.

He crumpled up without a sound.

I dashed to the door and slamming it behind me, marched whistling to the prison-gate.

"Come on, Bo!" growled the outer guard, standing by the open inner gate. "Thought you was never coming."

I came on merrily, and, as a puzzled frown gathered on the face of the guard, I once more cleared up the situation with promptitude and despatch.

Lamb-like and swiftly, he marched before me to The Fort, and was quickly locked into that silent and well-conducted room.

At top speed I rushed back to the office, and found the poor book-keeper still unconscious. In fact, at first, I feared he was dead, and was greatly relieved to discover that his heart was still beating.

It was a most distasteful task to turn him over and bind his hands behind him with his own suspenders, (braces), then strongly to tie the laces of his right boot to those of his left, and to gag him with his own coat-sleeves.

When I stepped out of that office and locked the door behind me, I was in sole and complete charge of that State Prison, whereof, a moment

later, the gates stood wide open. All I had to do, to be free, was to walk out of the prison, proceed to the prison-garage, and, in the Warden's own car, depart in peace—obviously a warder going about his lawful occasions in the prison-car.

I felt it was a unique occasion, a unique situation—but so thrilled, uplifted, *tête-montée* was I, that I decided to improve upon it.

I was absolutely free to go whenever I chose, and moreover, untrammelled and unsuspected, had hours of freedom, before the alarm could be given, the hue and cry be raised, pursuit begin.

But why should I not lengthen the priceless hours to be devoted to unhindered escape and concealment ?

Even one additional hour before the news was broadcast, telegraphed north, south, east and west, blazoned in every newspaper, might make a difference between successful permanent escape and a mere brief burst for freedom, inglorious and ineffective.

Thus thinking, I hurried across to the " Administration-block," and set about smashing the telephones and telegraphic instruments, and cutting every single wire that entered the administrative building.

This pleasing work of destruction and self-protection completed, I bethought me that, ere borrowing his official car, I might put the

Warden himself where he would do least harm for the longest space of time.

If I made off at once, leaving him peacefully slumbering in his bed in his house outside the walls, he would arise at the usual hour, breakfast, and stroll over to the prison at about nine o'clock—and by about one minute past nine the hunt would be up.

If, however, I put him "under restraint," not only would the moment of discovery be postponed, but, when it did arrive, the absence of the Warden would inevitably increase the confusion, and delay the inception of measures for my re-capture.

Straight from the "Administration-building" I hurried, passed through the wide-open gate-ways, scarcely believing the evidence of my own senses, and walked boldly up to the front door of the lonely house, close by, where, alone with his elderly Irish house-keeper, dwelt Warden O'Shaughnessy.

How to get into the house?

So cock-a-hoop, so filled with over-weening self-confidence was I, that I had not stopped to think of the little obstacle of locked, barred and bolted doors, nor of fastened windows.

True, I was fast becoming an accomplished and brilliantly successful "hold-up man", but I was no burglar. Nor, even had I served a full apprenticeship to that bold trade, was I

provided with the requisite and necessary tools.

How was I to place the Warden under arrest, if I couldn't get to him.

Another bright thought. I was excelling myself to-night. Since Mahomet couldn't go to the mountain, the mountain should come to Mahomet. Since I couldn't get in to the Warden, the Warden should come out to me.

Promptly I rang the front-door bell, a peal both long and loud, and then implemented this hurry-call with a handful of gravel, which I flung at the big bedroom window.

I will say the Warden was prompt. And add that he was distinctly peevish.

"What in hell . . ." he began, ere he had well thrown up the window.

"Quick, Warden!" I interrupted, "For the love o' Mike! You're wanted acrarse at the prison . . . Most urgent . . . A matter of loife and . . ."

"What's up, then?" roared the Warden.

"Don't roightly know, Sorr," I replied, "but I was towld to run loike the divvle and call . . ."

"Who are you?"

"Guard Mulligan, Sorr . . ."

"I'll be there . . ." snapped the Warden, and, within the minute, a light appeared, and I heard him turn the door-key and draw a couple of bolts.

As, clad in a long over-coat and pyjamas, he stepped out into the darkness, he felt the prod of an automatic in the pit of his stomach and heard the click of another pistol.

"Up with them, quick," I snapped, "and step back into the house."

Back went the Warden, his hands above his head and a look of almost ludicrous consternation on his face.

"Want to die right now?" I growled.

"Not so as you'd notice it," was the reply.

"Then do exactly what I tell you—and make it snappy—for I can shoot you here and now, and make my get-away."

"Sure thing," drawled the Warden. "Who are . . . ?"

"Don't talk. Who's in this house except you? Don't try any funny stuff if you want a look at to-morrow."

"An old dame," replied the Warden. "A little under a hundred years old, I reckon. She won't do a thing to you."

"About turn. March to her room and lock her in . . . If there *is* any funny stuff, you die before I do."

With my pistol touching his back, the Warden preceded me up the stairs, opened a door at the back of the house, took the key from the lock, closed and locked the door, and offered me the key.

"Pocket it, quick," I ordered, "and then raise your hands . . . Walk in front of me to where the garage key is; then to the garage and unlock it."

The Warden hung in doubt for the fraction of a minute, glancing at the pistol levelled at his stomach.

I raised another and pointed it at his face.

"Jump to it, Warden," I said. "You can die if you want to—but I'd like to spare your life."

He promptly turned about, and led the way downstairs and out of the house.

"That's the style," I said. "I'd hate to bump you off, Warden, but I'd hate a whole heap more to be bumped off myself."

Without reply he led the way to the garage.

"Have you got the key?" I asked.

"No."

"Get it then, quick."

"Can't."

"Why not?"

"There isn't one."

I laughed.

"You and I'll get on fine together, Warden, for the next few minutes . . . especially if you don't get fresh and make any mistakes," I added. "Open up that garage."

I then realised with some chagrin that I could have come straight to it and taken the car without this waste of precious minutes.

But then again, I reflected, it was well worth the lost time, to have the Warden safely under lock and key, and so to postpone the hour of discovery and pursuit in the morning.

Withdrawing a wooden peg from the staple-and-hasp, the Warden threw open the garage door.

"Fill the petrol tank and start the engine," I ordered, standing well away from the Warden and covering him with a pistol.

"And don't make any little slip, Warden, such as picking up a heavy spanner or reaching for a gun, if there's one in the car."

Satisfied that the petrol-tank was full, the engine running sweetly, and the car in complete readiness, I bade the Warden "hands-up" and march ahead of me into the prison.

"Sure thing," he drawled. "You coming too?"

"I'm coming, too, Warden," I promised.

"Well, well," he said. "Ain't life full of surprises? Except when it's damn dull."

He must have thought me mad, that I should voluntarily return to the prison from which I had escaped.

But he perceived a certain method in my madness when, after marching him through the open prison-gateway, past his office and the "Administration-block," and across the Square, I directed him into a certain sinister building,

and halted him at the door of the death-cell, wherein condemned murderers spend their last nights.

"Joke's on me," observed my captive.

"Sure thing, Warden," I replied cheerfully. "And I hope it'll only be a joke. It will, if you're a good boy. Keep those hands well up, please. Now, see here. I've gathered in these bunches of keys from the guards, watchmen, sentries and the clerk," and I threw the bunches of keys, on their big steel rings, at his feet.

"Find the key of that cell and hop inside, and I'll spare your life."

A minute later, the Warden was locked inside one of the strongest cells in the prison, and I was on my way to the prison gates, with a most useful collection of the prison keys.

It had only occurred to me, as we passed the Warden's Office, that there was a better scheme than locking him in The Fort with the rest. The longer it took them to find and release the Warden, the longer it would be before pursuit was organised, in the morning.

As I passed through the prison gates for the last time (I hope), it occurred to me that, if I chose to do so, I could release every single convict in that gaol.

I put the thought from me, however, realising that it would be a wicked thing to do, to turn

loose on that countryside, some hundreds of desperate criminals, with no money and no clothing other than their striped convict garb —save what they could procure by wide-spread robbery, violence and probably murder.

The vast majority of them were dangerous enemies of Society, not only expiating crimes, but rightly placed where they could not commit fresh ones.

I did not believe that there was one innocent man in a hundred of them, and all those whom I had heard speak upon the subject, boasted of their criminal exploits in the same breath that they cursed Society for punishing them.

I was sorry for them, sorry for every man of them, because I hold that, in the enormous majority of cases, the criminal is the victim to a great extent of heredity, environment and circumstance.

And then I thought of Rosemary, and my heart hardened to stone.

Had any one of that gang (or every one of the gang) been in the prison at that moment, I would have gone to his cell and shot him, in cold blood, for the foul dog that he was, and called that killing no murder, but an execution.

And then I thought of two convicts, neither of whom was proud of his wrong-doing, and neither of whom was any more a real criminal than was I myself—the boy called Kid Mailes

and old Snipe Freen. I would give them their chance.

This I could do without difficulty, as both were on my corridor, and the key of my cell would open theirs.

With my heart beating a good deal faster than usual, and my common-sense telling me I was a fool to lose precious minutes, I dashed back and unlocked the door of old Snipe's cell, the third beyond my own.

Snipe sat up and blinked, and I pulled off my cap, the peak or vizor of which shadowed my face.

" It's I, Freen," I said, " in a guard's uniform. I'm off, and I can take you with me. Come on, quick."

As soon as the old chap's slow and bewildered mind grasped the idea, he thanked me, with tears in his eyes and a break in his voice.

He would not come.

" No, son," he said. " I'm tired. I couldn't face it again. An old lag's got no chance. I wouldn't have a hope to keep straight, for the bulls wouldn't let me—and I ain't starvin' and cold and ragged and sleepin' in the rain here, anyhow. . . . I'd sooner die in this cell or the prison Infirmary than in a ditch or the gutter, in the snow on a winter's night. . . . No, God bless ye, son, and thank ye from the bottom of me heart, but ' No ' is me last word, so go quick, while the goin's good . . . And

lock me in again, boy, for fear I'm tempted, or they think I'm in it and beat me up."

"You're quite sure, Snipe? Don't be sorry afterwards . . . Quick . . ." I whispered.

"It's my last word, son. Good-bye. Good luck and God bless ye," and the old chap wrung my hand as though he would crush it.

Maile's cell was at the end, and he was off his plank bed and into his clothes almost before my first hurried sentence was completed.

"I'm with ye, Bo. Give us a gat and we'll shoot our way out, or die back-to-back."

"I'll do all the shooting that's to be done," I said, "and that's none. There's a boiler-suit, or a chauffeur's dungaree overalls, or something of the sort, hanging on the wall of the Warden's garage, so you'll have that much disguise till I can get you a cloth cap and an overcoat."

"The Warden's garage!" ejaculated the boy, as I locked the door of his cell behind us.

"Yes," I said, "we're going for a joy-ride in his car."

And in speechless amazement he followed me as I ran towards the prison gate.

Save for the sound of our footsteps, all was as silent as the grave, and, within about a couple of hours of Guard "Murphy's" entrance to my cell at ten o'clock, I was driving the prison car, at fifty miles an hour, in the direction of

the little quiet farm-house that a worthy crook—who must remain nameless—had been keeping ready for me, commissioned by Uncle.

Here were clothes, food, drink, as well as money and a high-powered car. In this last, having fed, rested, and changed our clothes, Mailes and I again drove off, leaving the prison car with our incriminating garments in it, locked in the garage.

A well-arranged fire, next day, burnt this garage (and its contents) to the ground. So well-arranged indeed was the fire, that there was strong presumptive evidence that at least one convict had perished in it, charred portions of a warder's uniform and of a convict's dress being salved from the almost unrecognisable remains of a motor-car and what appeared to be human bodies.

Our first drive had taken us nearly three hundred miles from the prison, and our second one ended at Chicago, where we went to earth, and, next day, I started young Mailes off to Canada, with my blessing, earnest advice, and a sufficient sum of money to keep him in honesty until he could find work.

With Uncle's invaluable help, I went to ground in a safe place ; lay low till the affair of my escape was forgotten in a new sensation ; and tried to come to some decision as to what I should do next.

CHAPTER V

I HAD had enough of suffering, hardship, squalor, brutality and ugliness, and I yearned for a spacious, gracious and beautiful way of life—almost as much as I yearned for vengeance upon Rosemary's murderers.

I would escape from the country, take a long rest, a long holiday from physical discomfort and sordidness, and recover a measure of health, strength and vigour.

I would live luxuriously abroad, and meanwhile my money should work for me—hiring the best brains in America, official and unofficial, for my work of pursuit and vengeance. But the millionaire St. Clair was dead and must remain so—dead as the escaped convict, No. 46783. Thus I planned and proposed—and found life too bitter to be borne . . . Dead Sea fruit . . . Dust and ashes in the mouth . . . I came near to suicide.

My new descent into the underworld, and fresh plunge into the murky turbid waters of crime, was in great measure due to a rather

remarkable dream, and what I still believe was my correct interpretation of it.

I dreamt that I was fishing in a great river ; fishing from its crumbling bank, with a rod of gold, and a bait of the nature of which I was uncertain. At times it seemed that I was fly-fishing, and that on my hook fluttered what looked like a hundred-dollar bill, and at others it seemed that my bait, deep down in the water, was a great gold coin.

And, as so often happens to me in dreams, I felt foolish, futile, ineffectual, and convinced of un-success. While my very life, and the salvation of my soul, seemed to depend upon my catching, not merely fish, but certain particular fish, I knew that my task was hopeless, and that no fish would look at my bait.

Tears ran down my face.

I groaned aloud, and then prayed fervently for help.

When, after ages of this hopeless and fore-doomed labour, I was about to abandon my effort in despair, I realised that a man whom I recognised, one Williams H. William, was standing at my elbow.

" What d'you know about seals ? " he remarked cryptically, pointing to the flash seal-ring which I wore upon the little finger of my right hand.

And, nodding encouragingly, he folded up his Cheshire-cat-like smile and stole silently away.

Of course.

Williams H. William, one of the cleverest private detectives who ever lived, and whom I had employed before I put an end to my life as John Dacre Waye Vanderleur St. Clair, the millionaire, had said something, as usual.

What did I know about seals!

Winding in my line and laying down my golden rod upon the bank, I dived headlong into the water, instantly became a seal and, a moment later, with a fierce triumphant joy flooding me from head to foot—or rather tail—I was pursuing fish in their own element.

In the very act of opening widely my jaws, armed with fierce-gleaming teeth, that they might meet deep in the quivering flesh of a hideous and sinister fish that fled before me, I awoke.

Idly pondering the dream next day—for I am a firm believer in the deep significance of dreams—I saw its meaning and application, returned to America, and, as I have said, plunged again into the foul river of crime, once more to be with, but not of, its denizens, and to discover and pursue certain of them in their natural element.

§ 2

The full story of my life in the rôle, or rather guise, of a criminal inhabitant of the underworld of crooks, would be as wearisome to read as it was to live. Like war, it was, after the first few weeks, a monotony of boredom, occasionally and rarely broken by brief periods of swift violent danger.

The crook's life is sordid, ugly, precarious, mean, furtive and base, a thing utterly devoid of beauty, peace, grace or any virtue, save that of a perverted loyalty. In it the ten commandments—much less the exhortations of the Beatitudes—have no place; for the crook has but one law and no beatitude whatsoever.

The law is " Thou shalt not squeak."

To squeak, squawk or squeal is to give information to the police, and that is the one and only thing that the crook must not do.

Let me say at once that, clever as I thought myself, and devilishly relentless, implacable and determined as I was, I should have had no success but for the help of three much cleverer people than myself—this same Williams H. William and his wife, and that amazing character known to most of the crooks of America, and to all those of Chicago, as " Uncle."

Williams H. William . . . and never, never, if

you should chance to meet him or write to him, make the—by him—unforgiveable mistake of addressing him as William H. Williams.

As he would indignantly and truculently point out to you, any dod-gasted fool could be William H. Williams. He was someone and something very different indeed, unique in fact —Williams H. William, to wit.

This remarkable man had started life as a travelling salesman, in which capacity his marvellous gift of tongues (or the gab), his ingratiating charming manner, his resource and indefatigable indefeasible tenacity, must have stood him in excellent stead. Later he had—and I do not wonder at it—become an actor, and through training and practice on the stage, his remarkable natural gifts were augmented by the acquired ones of impersonation, mimicry, and disguise.

By the time he gave up acting, to follow his real bent as a private detective, he was well equipped indeed. As a detective, his favourite and most useful rôle was that of a hopeless, helpless, yet cheerful inebriate, negligible in any saloon-gathering of crooks and conspirators, as being too hopelessly drunk, besotted and bemused to understand a word he heard, or to remember it if he heard it.

In the use of this particular disguise of his alert clever and courageous self, he was assisted

by an, otherwise unfortunate, affliction in the shape of a kind of skin disease or chronic erysipelas. As the result of this he had a pimply face, congested cheeks of an ugly and unwholesome colour and appearance, and a real drunkard's-nose.

In point of fact he was, by preference and conviction, a teetotaller, and he only drank when it was necessary to the part which he was playing.

No actor on any stage ever gave a finer performance than did Williams H. William in the part of a drunken British Officer, the dipsomaniac Colonel Campball, self-interned for cure, in a certain Nursing Home of which I shall tell later.

A scarcely less interesting and remarkable person than this Williams H. William was his wife. She too had been an actress, and, judging by her performances in private life, must have been a remarkably good one. She had been a member of the touring fit-up company of which Williams H. William was the leading man, and when they married and left the stage, it was the Drama's loss.

They were a devoted couple, and it was because they would otherwise be separated for a considerable portion of each year, that they decided to relinquish the modest but growing success which they had achieved, and tempt fortune afresh in this new walk of life.

Whether they would have risen to as high rank and fortune in their old profession as they did in the new, I do not know; but I personally did my best to give them reason to bless the day whereon they made the decision.

I employed them for years, paid them highly, and, in the end, endeavoured to give them a reward commensurate with my gratitude.

For, without them, my efforts would have been in vain; and to their cleverness, fidelity and courage I owe such measure of success as I have achieved.

They worked together, and their combined value as a pair was certainly three times as great as would have been the value of either of them working alone. Each was the complement of the other, each was as flint to the other's steel; and no finer pair of naturally and artificially gifted detectives ever worked together.

Greatly as I admired Williams H. William's art, in the part of Colonel Campball at the English nursing-home, I am not sure that I did not admire, even more, the acting of his wife, in the part of Miss Skinner, a neurotic, unbalanced youngish old-maid, an inveterate mischief-maker and scandal-monger, afflicted with a persecution-mania and all its unpleasant *sequelæ*.

Frankly Mrs. Williams H. William was not a very pretty woman. In appearance she was

small and wizened ; assertive, quarrelsome, and shrewish. Rarely did appearances more belie the truth. She was a dear, clever, delightful person. She had a great gift of silence and, when she chose to use it, an equally great gift of what one might term, for want of a better word, inconspicuousness.

Very few people who travelled in the same public vehicle with Mrs. Williams H. William, or who were, for a time, in the same room with her, could afterwards give any sort of identificatory description of her, even if they noted or remembered the fact of her presence and existence.

The third of the trio who kept hope alive in my heart (and therefore life in my body) was that astonishing product of his times and environment—to whom I have already referred, and whom I will now describe, the crooks' " Uncle "—albeit his help was given to me, in this case, unwittingly and unintentionally.

How shall one describe " Uncle," save by employment of oxymoron of the sharpest ?

For he was at once a shameless liar whose word was his bond, a cunning rogue of simple guileless mind, an inveterate thief with whom one could trust one's property as with a Bank, a bloody-minded murderer of the kindest heart and sweetest nature, a pleasant and gentle performer of savage and cruel deeds.

Uncle was a rascally gentleman, an honourable scoundrel, a law-abiding criminal and a beneficent malefactor.

No, one cannot describe the man; one can merely tell of some of the things he did and of some of the things he was.

In the good—or bad—old days, Uncle, a very prominent under-world politician, had been one of the best-known saloon-keepers in Chicago; and was, in these evil—or better—times, an even more prominent and important politician and proprietor of one of the best-known speak-easies or blind-pigs of the same city.

Uncle was not only "the little friend of all the (under) world," but also, apparently, of the police, who successfully or unsuccessfully, not only made use of him, but presumably found him useful; and one of the extraordinary things about this extraordinary man was the fact that, while he was known to be *persona grata* to the police, he was nevertheless absolutely trusted by the crooks—and with completest justification.

The police knew that he was the Criminal's Friend; criminals knew he was the friend and protégé of the police; and yet his unique position, power and reputation suffered with neither.

For the police rested assured that Uncle would put them on no false scent, give them no

false information, and bear no false witness whereby some innocent stranger should suffer for a crime committed by one of Uncle's friends.

Crooks, on the other hand, knew that there was not enough money in all the world—and Uncle was very fond of money—to bribe him to betray a trust, to sell a secret, or to give any information whatsoever, that could possibly injure any friend of his, or any man or woman who had confided in him.

And although this strange creature was admittedly and professedly the friend, helper, and confidant of crooks and criminals of every sort and kind, he was not, in the ordinarily accepted sense of the term, a crook or a criminal himself.

That is to say, he was not regularly and professionally engaged in the pursuit of any form of crime—save indeed that of vendor of illicit alcohol, a venal enough offence at that time and place, and one of which the police were perfectly aware and to which they were, in his case, perfectly indifferent.

Nor was Uncle in any sense of the word a fence, or receiver of stolen property, albeit he did, at times, " mind " for his friends large sums of money, and articles of the highest value, such as jewellery, which he must have known or very strongly suspected to have been stolen by those who entrusted them to his care.

For this service he made a fixed but very reasonable charge, and once a crook had deposited money, bonds, bullion or jewellery with Uncle, he knew it to be as safe as if it were in a Bank.

In fact, Uncle was the crooks' banker, a banker who asked no questions and was himself immune from questioning by the police—an immunity due partly to the fact that the police knew he would never, under any circumstances, answer a question that would inculpate or implicate a client, and partly because it was a recognised fact that Uncle was not only useful indirectly to the police, but was also, for political reasons, under the complete protection of some important and powerful " Higher-up."

For Uncle swung a very big vote, and if any officious and official new broom gave Uncle trouble, he would have cause, at a very early date, to telephone Uncle and, in haste, contrition, and perfect truth, observe :

" I'm sorry you've been troubled."

Williams H. William, like the Chief of Police, was of opinion that if anybody in America knew anything at all about the gang who had got away with the St. Clair diamond, it would, sooner or later, be my friend " Uncle."

For not only was he a clearing-house for all the gossip, rumour and information of crook-

dom, but was also, as has been said, the personal friend of all the biggest and best-known crooks, and the man to whom they went when they wanted a safe and sure repository for small and portable property which was at once extremely incriminating as well as extremely valuable.

Naturally it would be mere idiotic stultification to walk into Uncle's speak-easy for a drink, and simply say to him,

"Who was it kidnapped St. Clair's kid, and touched him for the big sparkler?"

Uncle would merely regard the speaker with cold suspicion, and ask him what he was talking about.

Were the subject pursued, it would transpire that Uncle had never heard of St. Clair, and didn't know that he ever owned an Unsetting Son or an unsetting daughter either.

No, our plan, as sketched out by Williams H. William, was that he and his wife should impinge most gradually upon the consciousness of Uncle, in the rôle of obviously very wealthy and successful crooks; that long after he was aware of them, they should very gradually cultivate him, and that after weeks and months—and, if necessary, a year—of slowly growing friendship and familiarity, they should, by slow degrees, attain to intimacy, and win his approval, liking, friendship and confidence.

Not, of course, in any hope that, having won his confidence, they would be able to induce him to betray any secrets, or intentionally to tell us anything detrimental to the interests of those who had trusted him.

Nothing so crude and simple as that.

For Uncle was a man of honour. Rogue, rascal, ruffian and reprobate he may have been, and was. But he was a man of honour.

He had his code, and he kept to it as rigidly and religiously as any monk or priest who ever lived. His word was literally his bond, and he was as trusted and trustworthy, in his own way, as Abraham Lincoln or George Washington himself.

No, there was no possible hope of any success based on Uncle's behaving treacherously. But there was, according to William, a chance that he might be hookwinked into indiscretion, for, like many other great men, Uncle had a weakness. He was no drunkard and indeed he rarely drank. But when he did, he drank a good deal; and, although he never became intoxicated, or went within measurable distance of intoxication, he would, on these occasions, become mellow, reminiscent, and communicative.

Even so, a single indiscreet question or remark would suffice to shut him up like an oyster.

On the other hand, a friend and confidant who talked wisely and well, gently leading the conversation in the required direction, might

learn a lot in the course of gossip—provided he betrayed no interest in what he heard, and contrived to convey the impression that all this was no news to him, and that he and Uncle were equally well informed upon the subject.

Naturally, Uncle was not our only hope, nor he and the clientéle of his speak-easy our only sources of information on the subject of the past and current history of the leading crooks whose more particular line of business was blackmail and kidnapping for ransom.

Not only did we frequent every likely blind-pig, speak-easy and blind-tiger, but, for a time, William and I actually opened and ran one of our own, in the hope that we might make it the rendezvous of the type of people with whom we wished to hold enlightening converse in their hours of ease.

This venture came to an abrupt end, however, for one day the representative of a big beer-baron, rival to him who supplied us with our liquor, burst into our thinly-disguised and perfunctorily-hidden saloon and sought sorrow.

He looked a tough bad man of the sort that was born hard-boiled and has grown harder every hour since.

William and I were in the bar at the moment, and William, as usual, was looking more than a little drunk.

"Say," bawled our visitor, "which of you guys runs this joint?"

"I do," admitted or boasted William, suppressing a hiccup. "Pleased to meet you."

"Well, look at here. You won't be pleased next time, if you go on selling any more North Side stuff, see? Beginning to-morrow you'll get your daily dollop of *our* dope—all you can sell and a little drop more—and you'll cash up to me every Sunday morning. Get me?"

"Sure thing," replied William. "I'll like your beer fine, but don't trouble to call round Sundays."

Our visitor's rock-like face became, if possible, more rock-like, as his eyes narrowed and the corners of his grim slit of a mouth turned further downward.

"Meaning how?" he growled.

"Meaning I'm fixed to pay dollars on Saturdays . . ." replied William . . .

"But I could pay in lead, Sundays, if you *must* come," he added.

The man's right hand, which had been resting on the bar, moved like lightning, there was a flash of blued steel from his hip-pocket, and a shattering bang.

But the bang came from William, and the North Side beer-baron's representative staggered back with a broken arm as an automatic pistol fell from his hand.

"Don't stoop for it, brother," advised William, "and go while the going's good."

Nursing his arm, the man staggered to the door, and, as he shouldered it open, turned and faced us.

"Make yer wills, both of ye," he growled, and was gone.

"I've been expecting just that," observed William. "Joint-keeping's a mug's game. Your own brewery shoots you up, if you switch over to another, and the other shoots you up if you don't."

He then rang up our own beer-baron's office to mention the matter, and received a reply to the effect that he knew his own business best, but, in any case, the usual amount of beer would be delivered every Monday, *and* the usual sum of money collected every Saturday.

On William pointing out that it was derogatory and insulting to the beer-baron that his preserves should be poached upon in this shameless way, that gentleman or his representative, replied to the effect that he wasn't worrying any, so long as William kept up his payments, and, in the event of his failing to do so, the worry would be upon William.

He did, however, add that, in the interests of sport and fair play, he would send Slipper M'Ginty round on Sunday morning, with instructions to join William and myself behind

the bar and shoot it out with the East Side representative and his friends when they came to collect.

This—provided we won the battle—might teach Big Bill Morrissy not to butt-in with his beer where he didn't belong.

However, as neither our hearts nor our resources were really in the beer business, and we were not out for death, notoriety, or trouble, we closed down and quit. We preferred to do wrong by stealth, and would have blushed to find it fame.

Patiently, carefully and gradually, the William couple made headway with Uncle and his friends, until, at length, they were accepted without question as a gang consisting of one wise guy and a smart jane, of the exclusive aristocracy of crookdom, who worked their own racket in their own way, took no one into their confidence and made a very great deal of money.

It was generally supposed that Williams H. William and I sometimes worked together, and were con-men of the very first order, and Mrs. Williams H. William our invaluable spy, decoy, confederate, and general assistant. . . .

Long before we got any evidence, or even a clue that was more than a mere suspicion as to the identity of the gang we were pursuing, I had

attained the honour of meeting all the most distinguished denizens of the underworld, and, at one time or another, encountered such eminent ladies and gentlemen as Dion O'Banion, bootlegger; John Duffy, gunman; Scarwell Merioneth, rum-king; the Denna brothers, his rivals; Johnny Morrio, captain of the Five Points Gang, brewer and rum-runner; Mike Zerlo, head of the Sicilian Union; Big Joe Dolosimo, multiple saloon-proprietor and Managing Director of the Chicago vice-business; Chicago May, Queen of the Underworld; Ginger Janey, also Queen of the Underworld; Levee Lou, likewise Queen of the Underworld; and Victoria Moresco, yet a fourth; Hymie Keiss, bootlegger and gunman, Morrio's great rival and enemy; Schemer Druggi; Bugsy Moran; Eddie Guerin, who did *not* escape from Devil's Island but from Cayenne; Maxie Ebben; Tony Tombardo; John Malisi and Albert Lanfran, two of the deadliest gunmen who ever lived; Samoots Alatuna, a man of light and leading; and Fosmano, the star-gunman, most dependable of killers.

Rising to higher levels, we also made the useful acquaintance of policemen, lawyers and politicians, and I came to know such eminent citizens as Police-Chief Morgan A. Hollis, Attorney Patrick O'Connell, Hinky Dink Henna, and Bathhouse John Conklin.

It was once even my privilege to shake the hand of that great patriot and guardian of his country, who, if he resembled George Washington in no other particular, did so by reason of the fact that he untiringly devoted his talents and his days to the thwarting and defeat of the dark insidious schemes of another British King George, and made plain and public just what he would do in the (somewhat improbable) event of that monarch's entering Chicago with evil intent.

It must not be supposed, of course, that we devoted the whole of our time and attention to Chicago, which is probably no more of a crooks' preserve than New York, San Francisco, London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, or any other big city.

We worked Chicago chiefly by reason of our hopes founded on the encyclopædic knowledge of Uncle, but we spent weary weeks and months in New York, San Francisco and other cities, which the fine-spun tenuous web of our clues enmeshed.

Nor did all three of us always work together.

Sometimes William would dash off, following the scent that might possibly lead us to the lair of our beasts.

Sometimes Mrs. William would follow up a clue, and sometimes I would go alone.

On one occasion, we all set off to Buenos

Ayres, and thence to Rio de Janeiro, on the trail of a gang of vice-merchants and white-slavers known to run kidnapping-for-ransom as a side-line.

It was in the lovely city of Rio de Janeiro, where indeed every prospect pleases and only man is vile, that William made the acquaintance of the individual who was unconsciously to lead us to success.

This was a brilliantly clever, weak and unscrupulous doctor, a Portuguese named Manoel Machado, whose scoundrelly trade was dope-peddling on a large scale, the performance of illegal operations, and the removal, by untraceable poisons, of his clients' inconvenient friends or enemies, highly-insured relatives, or aged and wealthy testators whose residuary legatees were growing impatient of their selfish clinging to a life that could hold few pleasures.

Disappearing from Rio, this man fled to Chicago, where he went to earth and, in due course, appeared at Uncle's.

CHAPTER VI

AND Uncle, one evening, mellow and merry, perfectly sober, but as nearly drunk as it was possible for Uncle to become, was in expansive and reminiscent mood.

Even so, as well we knew, sharp question would have received short answer, and our fish would, for the hundredth time, need skilful playing if he were to be landed where we wanted him.

As usual, when Uncle was alone with us three honoured and respected crooks of highest grade, William led and gently held the conversation.

We talked of ships and sealing-wax and cabbages and kings (of crime)—particularly of the latter. Anon Uncle made allusion to the brilliance and success of one, Limey Simon, an English doctor, and his gang.

Yawning deeply, and scratching his head idly, William observed :

" Haven't heard of that outfit for a long time."

(We knew the name, of course.)

" No, and you ain't likely to," smiled Uncle,

as he slid the bottle along the zinc-topped bar.

"Restin' up?" murmured William.

"Columbia Gaol, Ohio, two of them. Doc Simon and Chink Dorson. Five-spot stretch," said Uncle . . . "Spider Schlitz only took one year . . . But I guess Doc Limey'll work his ticket. He's got a pull and he's got the dough."

Mrs. Williams H. William drew a mighty bow at a venture.

"Tell you a thing always got me guessin', Uncle," she observed, "and that's whether Soapy Simon got that big sparkler cut up, or sold it whole."

"What, the St. Clair shiner, The Unsetting Sun?" mused Uncle.

I held my breath in an agony of hope.

"Ah! I always said Limey Doc Simon over-reached himself that time," continued Uncle. "He should have been content with the money and the little sparklers. I told him he'd brought a dam' white elephant in his pocket when he showed it me. Who'd buy the thing, and no questions asked? Who'd cut it up, and no questions asked? And when I say cut it up, I mean cut it up properly, so that the two halves or the four quarters of it would fetch their value. . . . Very pleased with himself, he was—and so was Spider

Schlitz and Chink Dorson, and allowed they'd done something mighty clever . . . 'Yes,' I said, 'and you skip to Paris with that, and you'll get what Eddie Guerin got, and much about the same if you take it to Amsterdam to them dromedaries or lapidaries or whatever you call 'em' . . . 'Oh, we'll sell it by private treaty to some other millionaire or to some goddam Rajah by-and-bye, when the mud's settled and the hue-and-cry's over,' says English Doc Simon, in his big way . . . 'You won't,' says I, 'and you won't try, unless you're a bigger dam' fool than you look' . . . 'Well, we'll put it in cold storage a bit, and see who's right, Uncle,' says Simon, and I was never quite sure whether they didn't get themselves gaoled for an alibi and a safe hide-up."

I cannot speak for myself, but I can testify that the acting of Williams H. William and his wife was as fine as anything ever done on the stage.

The closest of observers would have sworn that they were a thoroughly bored uninterested pair of idle gossips, talking for the sake of talking, half-fuddled, and wholly indifferent to the subject of conversation.

For myself, I scarcely breathed, and for the want of some better disguise for my excitement, I feigned slumber.

"Well, well, Uncle," yawned William.

"They ought to of listened to you, for when you talk you cert'nly say something."

"Sure," smiled Uncle, and taking a cigar from his vest-pocket, began to eat it, or at least to chew it and the cud of reflective reminiscence.

"Yes, they was three bright boys," he said, "and that fella Gunman Gryde, Young Jimmy you know, was real unhealthy for all their enemies."

"Let's see, Gunman Gryde . . . Didn't he shoot up the Fratelli family, that time? . . ." murmured William.

"Yep. Did you know he's Doc Simon's son? . . . And 'Frisco Fanny's?"

"Sure," lied William, sliding the bottle back to Uncle. "Bad boy, Young Jimmy."

"Be another Fosmano if he don't get put on the spot first," observed Uncle, "or if he doesn't double-cross Louie the Lady and get his, that way."

"He in stir, too?" asked Mrs. William.

"Nope. Runnin' with the Hudson Dusters till Pop comes out."

"When he does, I guess he'll see Europe, eh? With the big sparkler in his pocket. Wonder where he cached it when he went to gaol?" mused William idly, as he yawned again.

"*Ah!*" smiled Uncle knowingly, and laid a fat forefinger on the side of his fat nose.

I cannot begin to describe how I felt that night.

I was almost happy, for hope dawned in my darkened soul—even though it were but the miserable hope of vengeance on these devils who had murdered my Rosemary.

§ 2

A few weeks later, Williams H. William heard a rumour in our Whispering Gallery of the Underworld that the man, known, among other names, as Doc English, Half-hung Simon, and Limey Simon, had been illegally released from gaol and had been seen at San Francisco in the company of one of his accomplices, Spider Schlitz, whose one-year term of imprisonment had expired at about the same time.

Hurrying round to Uncle's for further news —the matter to be mentioned most casually in the course of idlest conversation, of course— we learnt, on fairly good authority, that the man Schlitz was staying openly at the Kearney House in San Francisco, while Simon was in hiding in Rio de Janeiro, for the purpose of bringing off some coup or other. Gunman Gryde was reported to be still in New York, and Chink Dorson still in Columbia Gaol, where he had four years yet to serve.

After a council of war, we decided that we would once again separate, William going to

San Francisco, his wife to New York, and I to Rio Janeiro.

Should the gang assemble in one of these three places, we three would do the same, and lay our plans accordingly.

What I really wanted to do to them, and what I really hoped for, I did not know—beyond some kind of terrible punishment and revenge.

What I constantly visualised, and what constantly caused me to awake from sleep—with my hands clutching and flexed—was the thought, the yearning, the *idée fixe*, of my hands upon the throat of each of these subhuman devils in turn. Dorson I would some day kill with my bare hands; Schlitz I would kill with my bare hands; from Simon, apparently their leader, I soon would choke the life; and, oh, slowly, slowly, almost reluctant to make an end, would I, with iron fingers, strangle the man Gryde, that "Jimmy" whose name my daughter had shrieked in terror.

§ 3

In Rio Janeiro I lived my miserable life of hope deferred—sick at heart and ill of body, drifting to break-down and probably madness, for I could find no trace of the man Simon, though I was able to learn his history pretty thoroughly.

And then, again, I got renewed hope in a letter from Williams H. William who "was certain that he was on the trail and would write again—great news."

But before hearing from him again I—clever fellow—was myself off on a new clue and a red-hot trail that led me right across the continent, first to Rosario, then over the Andes to Valparaiso; thence to Callao; from Callao to Seattle; and finally across the Pacific to Shanghai—there to run to earth, at last, the gang of white-slavers whom I had been pursuing, only to find, in the end, that they were not our gang at all.

At the end of my tether, mental, moral and physical, I crawled back to Chicago.

CHAPTER VII

AWAITING me in Uncle's competent and inviolable care, was a packet of heavily-sealed letters from Williams H. William. The latter—leaving a sum of money in Uncle's entirely trustworthy hands, had gone to England in pursuit of Simon, the English doctor whom he had discovered, beyond any possibility of doubt, to be the leader of the gang whom we were tracking.

I learned with admiration and amazement that my wonderful William and his equally wonderful wife, who had rejoined him, had gone to England too, and were actually living beneath the roof of the well-known and excellently-conducted Nursing-Home that this man, " Half-hung Simon," a genuine M.D., whose real name was Theodore Charters, conducted with the help of none other than Dr. Manoel Machado, whose acquaintance he had made at Uncle's, while I was abroad.

Himself disguised, William had, in Chicago, shadowed Charters and Machado and also Charters' former confederate, Spider Schlitz, with whom Charters seemed to have quarrelled.

The former pair, he had, as I have said, followed to England, and while himself a "patient" in Charters' Nursing-Home, had seen Spider Schlitz visit the house.

Promptly William had slipped out from the Nursing-Home, gone to the one and only railway station, at the neighbouring village, picked up Spider Schlitz, followed him on his return journey, and located his place of abode, a fine old country house in which he was living in some style, as a country gentleman. Having learned all that was necessary, he had returned as the penitent prodigal back from a drunken debauch, full of apologies and promises of reform—if the good Dr Charters would take him back once more.

William wrote that both he and his wife felt sure that Charters, Machado and Gryde must have one or more confederates among their large staff of nurses and domestics, but had been unable to identify any of them. On the whole, they rather suspected the chief Nursing Sister, but that without any real reason, and only on the strength of her somewhat florid appearance.

In reply to a cable in our own cipher, William sent me a plan of the house and grounds, and a most full and detailed account of the daily routine of the Nursing-Home, and more par-

ticularly of Charters' habits, hours, comings and goings, and everything else which would probably or possibly be of use to me for carrying out the scheme that was slowly developing in my mind.

§ 2

In pursuance of this scheme, I sailed for England as soon as I had obtained in the usual manner—well known to all crooks—a forged passport; taking with me as much money as I was likely to require, and making arrangements, through the invaluable Uncle, for yet further supplies, should they be necessary.

Arrived in England, Mr. John Waye, a grim-faced, grey-haired, clean-shaven man who bore, perhaps, a slight resemblance to the long-dead millionaire, John Dacre Waye Vanderleur St. Clair, visited the famous specialist, Sir Bernard Matthieson, who diagnosed pretty accurately a bad case of neurasthenia-with-complications in the man who had carefully refrained from food and sleep for three days, and had taken certain heart-affecting and nerve-shattering concoctions well-known to malingering convicts.

Sir Bernard quite agreed with his new patient's suggestion that he should take a thorough rest-cure in one of the best country Nursing-Homes.

Mr. John Waye also did a little business with a courteous and helpful Bank Manager and with a certain Solicitor not unknown to crooked American ladies and gentlemen in London, who are also in trouble, or who anticipate that they shortly will be in trouble.

All things methodically arranged with careful and cold-blooded deliberation, he set about the consummation of his first act of vengeance —the punishment of Spider Schlitz.

I say "punishment."

It is but a euphemism for killing.

I will not call it murder, for this was, if ever, a case of "killing no murder"—an extermination of reptile vermin.

My plan, in outline, was to kill Spider Schlitz, and flee, instantly, direct to the sanctuary of Charters' Nursing-Home.

Here, without making myself known to him, I should be safe—if I were safe anywhere, for, without knowing who I was, he should pretty promptly know that my discovery and arrest would precede his by but a few hours.

§ 3

Of Williams H. William I had been the industrious apprentice, the indefatigable and not inapt pupil, and I do not think he would have been ashamed of my playing of my part

at Witherby End while I was studying the lie of the land and the habits of Squire Theophilus Webb—as Spider Schlitz was there known and admired.

Nor do I think that any of the Best Burglars would have been genuinely scornful of my reconnaissances of Squire Webb's grounds and mansion.

What I needed was to make my silent entry into the house and, unseen by any, make contact with that worthy. Let me but come face to face with him, unheard, and I would undertake that he too would be unheard—that he would die without a word, a sound, my hands upon his throat . . .

> *"My strength is as the strength of ten*
> *Because my heart is pure."*

Pah! My strength should be as the strength of a hundred because my heart was a hell of seething hate and vengeance.

§ 4

I had been about a fortnight or so in Witherby End when I suddenly got one of the shocks of a life-time not wholly devoid of incident and tense moments.

Entering the inn one evening, to buy me a drink and hear yet more of the local gossip, ere going up to my room, I came suddenly face

to face with a very broad tall strong man whose hard face, cruel mouth, and broken flattened nose were vaguely familiar.

I had never seen him before, but I had most certainly seen either his photograph or a newspaper reproduction thereof, obtained for me by William, and enclosed in one of the many letters that had awaited my arrival at Uncle's. I was, moreover, word-perfect, from William's detailed description of this man, as I was of the three other miscreants whom I hoped and intended to bring to justice—*my* justice.

Luckily, he was glancing at the evening paper, and I had plenty of time in which to pull myself together, decide upon my course of action, and remember the invaluable histrionic teachings of Mr. and Mrs. Williams H. William.

And then was played as thrilling a little scene—with a thread of comedy in its grimness—as any in the tragic drama of my quest. For, ere long, *Chink Dorson* was warily and cunningly questioning *me* as to the character, reputation, habits, way of life, comings and goings, of Squire Theophilus Webb of Witherby End—his old acquaintance, Spider Schlitz!

Yes, I was actually being cross-examined by Chink Dorson, prize-fighter, yegg, burglar, strong-arm man, thug, and gunman, whose

cunning subtle brain and cold determined courage had brought him to the top of his profession as the right-hand man of the notorious Englishman, Doc Simon.

. . . Who was I? . . . Oh, just a very ordinary middle-class Englishman, staying at Witherby End for some fishing.

. . . Yes, very fond of fishing indeed . . . Hadn't tried it here before, but should certainly come again.

Yes, Squire Webb had the rights and was very generous about them. Did no fishing himself.

Yes, Witherby Stream ran right through his grounds, and one could go the whole way in a punt, right through his park, once one had obtained his fishing-permit. A good landlord and a regular fellow.

Yes, lots of scandalous stories about him, his guests, his household, and the goings-on there.

In residence now? Yes.

And many more questions, gradually narrowing down to those concerning Mr. Webb's daily life, ways, habits, customs, comings and goings.

I gave the fellow all the information I could, and every possible help, short of seeming to know too much.

For a magnificent new scheme, or rather enlargement of my original scheme, was forming in my mind.

If, as Williams H. William had written to me, Simon had probably been released from prison before the others, and had then gone to Uncle, collected the Unsetting Sun and other loot that was the common property of the gang, and bolted with it to England—it was more than likely that Spider Schlitz had followed him in the hope of getting his share, and that Chink Dorson, having served his term and been released, was now in hot pursuit of both of them.

If this were not the situation, or something very near it, why should Chink Dorson be here at Witherby End, cunningly collecting the sort of information that any burglar gathers before "cracking a crib?"

If Chink Dorson's intentions were any but the worst possible, why did he trouble to ask any questions at all? Why didn't he drive straight up to his old friend's front door, and, being shown into his presence, extend the glad right hand of friendship, and gather him in brotherly love to his broad and palpitating bosom?

No. Adding together the sound deductions that William had made, and my own deductions based on Chink Dorson's present conduct, I felt pretty confident, nay certain, that he was at Witherby End neither for his own health nor that of Spider Schlitz, but for his own

enrichment and the punishment of one of the two men who had double-crossed and robbed him.

How utterly splendid; what a wonderful and beautiful example of poetic justice it would be—if these two wolves destroyed each other, leaving me free to deal with the remaining pair!

For the weak spot in my scheme, the weak link in my chain of vengeance—and the one that kept me anxiously awake at night—was the danger that I might be arrested and tried as the slayer of the first or second of my victims, before I had had time to deal with the third and fourth.

After that, it would not matter.

Nothing would matter.

But I scarcely dared to contemplate the horror of failure and my being hanged before my work was finished; or at best, sentenced to life-long imprisonment in England, as I had been in America.

I had to bear in mind that my life-sentence still awaited me in America, and that I might easily receive one in England, if I escaped hanging.

So what a grim and lovely jest if I could a little help Chink Dorson to kill Spider Schlitz, and then greatly help the English law to kill Chink Dorson for the murder!

Both would be punished without endangering my freedom to pursue the other two.

Both would, in a measure, be punished by, and through, me.

And they would wholly, solely and entirely be punished on account of me—through their killing of my daughter and their stealing of my diamond, the bone of their contention and the cause of their mutual destruction . . .

§ 5

. . . Could I recommend decent accommodation to my newly-arrived acquaintance?

He would only need it for a few days. He just wanted to have a look at Witherby End and its environment. He was thinking of settling down in the country and having a bit of sport; and this place had been recommended to him.

I could. What was wrong with this Inn? I had found it very comfortable . . .

Could one get in without a lot of fuss, at night, if one happened to be a bit late? And Mr. Chink Dorson winked heavily, as one gay dog to another.

Why certainly . . . I myself often went night-fishing, and all one had to do was to walk in at the back door. Very confiding people, these country folk. Honest and simple. Crime absolutely unheard of hereabouts. . . .

But at this pace my tale will grow over-long.

To cut a long story short, I shadowed Chink Dorson with a skill and tenacity born of my burning lust for vengeance. I tracked him like a red Indian. I watched him from afar, by day, and from near-by at night; and in the end, at long last, as I sat in the dark shadow of a great Cedar of Lebanon, I saw Chink Dorson, whom I had followed—and, by a short cut over the park wall, forestalled—creep quietly from tree to tree, up the moon-lit drive that led to Squire Webb's big house.

Whether Chink Dorson, with the burglarious skill that had made him eminent and famous, himself opened the door by which he entered the house, or whether it had been left open for him by a servant whom he had suborned or whom he had planted there, I do not know.

What I do know is that, in a state of exultant exaltation, I followed him and, guided by the sound of voices, came straight to the door of the room which proved to be Mr. Webb's library.

Hearing the sounds of a struggle, which were followed by a dead silence, I could not forbear to open this door, to see with my own eyes the consummation of the first part of my dream of revenge.

On the floor, obviously dead, lay Spider Schlitz.

The first of my enemies had paid the penalty. He had received the punishment directly due for stealing my diamond, the act which led to the death of my daughter.

And now for the punishment of the second one.

Softly closing the door, I tiptoed away to where the shadows of the landing were darkest, and crouched down beside, and partly behind, the pedestal of a ghostly-looking statue.

A minute later, the door of the library opened, softly closed again, and the figure of Chink Dorson passed between me and the moon-lit window on the other side of the broad landing.

After a couple of minutes of listening for any sound in that silent house, I crept across and entered the room, and, I admit with shame, sat for awhile and gloated upon the hideously distorted face of the first of Rosemary's murderers to receive his punishment.

And the wicked joy of my heart was increased appreciably by the thought that it was in punishment of that very crime—and not of one of his myriad others—that this enemy of mankind had met his fate.

It was over my diamond that they had quarrelled, and that he had been murdered, and it was through their theft of my diamond that Rosemary had died.

"*Number One,*" I whispered, "Number One,

you reptile," and kicked him with all my strength. I confess it with deep shame and contrition. . . . But in those days I was not really a sane person.

And now for Number Two.

Evidently Chink Dorson had made a search —presumably for the diamond—as the floor in front of an open safe was strewn with scattered papers.

Picking up, in my gloved hand, one of these, of which the back was blank, and taking a pencil from my pocket, I wrote in block capitals :

"SO PERISH ALL WHO DOUBLE-CROSS CHICAGO CHINK. SIGNED, CHINK DORSON."

This document I attached to the lapel of Spider Schlitz's coat, by means of the stick-pin from his tie.

Surely this would put the British Scotland Yard in communication with the American Police and would, in conjunction with Dorson's finger-prints and the anonymous letter that I would write to Scotland Yard, put the halter about Dorson's neck.

Meanwhile I must get secretly and safely away from the scene of the crime, for, were I to be arrested on suspicion, I might be identified, and I well might, even though I proved my innocence of this crime, find myself extradited

to America and returned for life to the gaol whence I had escaped.

Departing swiftly and safely from the silent house, I walked to the railway-station, but only entered it when, in the distance, I saw an approaching train.

The same afternoon, by the means suggested to me by William in his latest letter, I made my way, at the luncheon hour, into the great park that surrounded The Monastery Nursing-Home, crossed the grounds and gardens nonchalantly, and sat awhile on a seat in a shrubbery near the house.

At half-past one—after carefully studying William's sketch plan—I crossed a wide lawn, apparently unseen by any, and stepped over the broad low window-sill of the open window of what I correctly supposed to be the Doctor's consulting-room.

§ 6

It had been my intention, in the event of such success as I had achieved, to sit me down in an arm-chair, light a cigarette, and recline at my ease until such time as Charters should enter his consulting-room.

I did not carry out this programme in full.

I had seated myself in the deep and comfortable arm-chair which faced his desk, taken out my cigarette-case and tapped a cigarette

upon it, when, glancing idly round the wonderfully beautiful old room, my eye fell upon, and promptly noted, the great heavy velvet curtains which hung on either side of the window by which I had entered.

An impulse, for the following of which I have ever been most profoundly thankful, urged me to conceal myself behind one of them, and study my man before he saw me.

Exactly what I might gain by this I did not know.

Probably the idea was the result and product of William's training, and of the years spent in the atmosphere and environment of crookdom. I did not so much argue, as feel, that it would be a sound thing to do, probably giving me some advantage over my victim, or rather the man whom I hoped would be my victim.

Rising from my chair and straightening its cushion, I stepped behind the curtain that was nearest to the desk, settled myself as comfortably as I could against the wall, and draped the curtain as naturally as possible in front of me.

Fortunately it was not only voluminous, but hung from a curtain-pole, or a pelmet, that stood out a foot or more from the top of the window.

I was comfortably ensconced, completely

hidden, both from within and without, and perfectly safe, but could see nothing. This disability I remedied later, by taking out my pocket-knife and cutting a small slit in a fold of the curtain where it bulged in toward me, when Charters was out of the room.

Yes, I reflected, undoubtedly my impulse had been a sound one. I might, if I chose, hide in the house until a real air of mystery would surround my discovery; I might, if lucky, by remaining where I was, overhear, with benefit to my plans, conversation between Charters and Machado or Gryde; I might, by waiting, watching and listening, learn which of his female staff were 'Frisco Fanny and Louie the Lady, believed by William to be respectively his own and his son's wife.

And at least I could choose my own dramatic moment for confronting him, and starting that reign of terror which I hoped to inaugurate.

According to his daily custom, exactly as Williams H. William had told me, the man Charters bustled into the room and set about his afternoon's work. . . .

Nor was it long before I was listening, with breathless interest, and boiling indignation, to what was obviously a plot between him and the relative of one of his patients, for the murder of that patient.

Not for nothing had I associated with, listened to, and watched, some of the worst and wickedest criminals in the world.

These two—the faces of both of whom I could, now, thanks to the cut in the curtain, clearly see—understood each other, and their conversation was a marvel of conciseness and, compression.

When the woman scribbled something on a scrap of paper and Charters, having glanced at it, crumpled it and threw it into the waste-paper-basket, I knew that I had the key to whatever, otherwise cryptic, cipher it might contain.

(Late that night I recovered it and found that the woman had merely written upon it the figure one, and four noughts. Ten thousand. The price of a girl's life, as I knew from what I'd heard. And it was then that I thanked the impulse—or the Power—that had sent me, melodramatically play-acting if you will, behind my curtain.)

Later, when Charters was alone, his face turned from me, his eyes covered by his hand, I stepped silently from my hiding-place and, as he looked up, was between him and the window.

To the hour of his death he must have believed that I had that moment stepped silently into the room from the lawn without.

I thank God that it was not so.

CHAPTER VIII

OF my sojourn in that excellent and extremely well-run Nursing-Home, The Monastery, I have not space, time nor desire to tell, for I wish to write not of myself, but of Marjorie—of Marjorie who now came into my life and altered it and me.

Not intentionally: not by anything she did, but by being Marjorie.

I saved her life, but she saved my soul . . . my self . . . my real self. . . . Marjorie, the child who, for thirty pieces of silver—or ten thousand pieces of gold—this dog would have betrayed to a cruel death.

Marjorie, in complete ignorance, and so without a word of remonstrance, exhortation, or admonition, and merely by being Marjorie, worked this miracle, this spiritual alchemy, and slowly changed a bitter, cruel, murderous and vengeful savage back into a decent human being.

She changed a seared and branded convict, of hate-clouded mind—a man who was less a man than a vengeance incarnate—back into,

at least, the semblance of what he once had been before the blows of fate had bludgeoned him to his knees, and stricken him down into the mire.

The morning after my arrival at The Monastery, entering the dining-room to display myself to my fellow-patients, and to play my chosen part of a person irresponsible and eccentric to the point of lunacy, I came face to face—and even now I can scarcely write the word with untrembling hand—I came face to face, I say, *with my daughter Rosemary . . .*

" Rosemary ! " I gasped, in utter amazement, utter incredulity.

Had I become insane indeed ?

For the girl, sitting and smiling opposite to me, was Rosemary's self as Rosemary must have been had she lived.

I had not seen her face when she was in the consulting-room, for I had, at that early moment, feared to move the curtain, and I did not cut the tiny slit until she had gone out of the room.

This was a girl who might be of any age from eighteen to one or two-and-twenty, and so amazingly, so miraculously like Rosemary that, at the age of twelve, she must have been Rosemary's indistinguishable twin and double

—or as I say, had Rosemary lived, thus must she have been to the last detail . . .

The same fair golden corn-coloured hair . . . the same creamy complexion . . . well-marked long eyebrows of identical shape and colour . . . the same sweetly-moulded lips and rounded chin . . . the same indescribable eyes with always-large pupils and irises that were now the grey of deep ocean, now hazel, now almost dark blue, but always flecked with little gleams of gold . . . a girl of the same height and size and form and figure that Rosemary's would have been . . .

Almost I went to her and took her in my arms.

Almost—and for the first time since Rosemary died—I broke down and lost control of voice and lips and tears.

Rosemary . . .

§ 2

It is, I understand, a law of physical Nature, that two things cannot occupy the same space at the same time.

It was soon, slowly but surely, borne in upon my consciousness that this law applies equally to things of the spirit.

I came to The Monastery with my soul, mean and small as it was, filled with thoughts of vengeance and murder, punishment and death.

I was Hate . . . I was Retribution . . . I was Vengeance . . . I was bloody-minded unrelenting Nemesis.

Even in my better moments, when I remembered that "Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord," I again argued that, for His vengeance, the Lord must need a human instrument, and that I would be that instrument.

And when, in the unbearable anguish of my darkened mind, I cried, "How long, oh Lord, how long?" I answered, "'The mills of God grind slowly,' and I cannot wait . . . His justice is slow, is sure . . . Man's justice is slow and far from sure . . . I will be my own justice . . . my own law, a law unto myself."

My mind was diseased, decadent, unsocial, and destructive.

And now, gradually, almost from that hour, the subtle change began, and in dual way.

Not only had Rosemary come again into my life in the form of Marjorie Lauderdell, reawakening the greatest and noblest of all human emotions, but, for the first time in many years, I was at last thinking of someone other than myself.

Gradually I thought less of my own stratagems and plots, and more of plans for another person; less of vengeance, murder and destruction, and more of help, preservation and salvation; less and less of the affairs of the wretched John

Dacre Waye Vanderleur St. Clair, and more and more of those of Marjorie Lauderdell.

What I have said is no exaggeration.

If I saved her life, she saved my soul; and if I helped her to happiness, she brought to me that which I had never expected to know again—peace, and that joy and happiness which only peace can bring.

The change in me was, of course, gradual, almost imperceptible, but the day dawned when I realised that I was no longer waiting at The Monastery in the rôle of avenger, but in that of protector and rescuer.

I was not biding my time, merely to choose the occasion and the moment for my vengeance, but waiting until the arrest and execution of Chink Dorson should leave me free to move about without fear of arrest—a very real fear, for my description had been broadcast by the police as that of a suspicious stranger who had hung about at Witherby End, and had mysteriously disappeared by early morning train, immediately after the murder.

Possibly, even if arrested on suspicion and proved to have been in the house that night, I could clear myself of the charge of murder, but I might as well be hanged in England as unmasked, exposed, and sent back to live a lingering death in the American prison from which I had escaped.

Once Chink Dorson was arrested, found guilty and hanged, I should be comparatively safe, and could then set about effecting Marjorie's escape from her position of danger, a danger of devilishly subtle nature.

For my own fate I honestly now cared little ; but what would be the child's fate if, escaping, I were arrested in her company, and she, without money and without friends, again fell into the clutches of that vile woman, her uncle's wife, and this viler man, Charters ?

§ 3

The moment that I saw Marjorie I loved her, because she was my daughter Rosemary.

Imperceptibly but quickly, in this forcing-house of stress and danger, my deep devoted love for her changed, changed completely, indescribably, incredibly, and, while loving her —I fell in love with her.

I can express myself no better than that, and can make myself no clearer.

Women and men of understanding will understand, and, to others, no words of mine could explain the change that gradually came about.

We had a meeting-place, a secluded spot of our own among the ancient ruins that gave the Nursing-Home its name ; and there we would meet to compare notes, to exchange news of developments, and to make plans.

It was this that first brought realisation—in a flood of golden light illuminating my soul and filling it with joy ineffable—for I soon found that, instead of approaching our trysting-place in the spirit of a father about to meet an adored daughter, I was doing so in the true spirit of a lover.

At first I was like a devoted parent, who at the end of the term that has seemed so long and lonely, goes to bring from school the daughter whose absence has made home so homeless and the heart yet fonder.

Before long, I was like any boyish lover who, after counting the hours and the minutes since the last meeting, goes with trembling joy and singing heart afire, to see the face, to hear the voice, to touch the hand, of her who is his world, and without whom the world is nought.

Yes, I loved Marjorie when I saw her, and I fell in love with her when I knew her—desperately, irrevocably . . . hopelessly.

Oh Marjorie, Marjorie! . . . And never did you dream of it.

Who can love—and hate? What mind can be filled at the same moment with highest, purest most unselfish love—and with deepest, blackest most hideous hate?

Yet love has its antithesis and antipodal parallel. For although my own affairs now

seemed but small and petty, the more I loved Marjorie the more I hated those who would injure her.

That Charters and his foul son had done me the deadliest wrong was not now the reason for my just wrath against them. It was because of their intent to injure Marjorie that I so hated them.

Had I never seen Marjorie, I would have killed them both in my own way and at my own time—the time that gave me best opportunity of escape—for my vengeance would be incomplete if I died on their account.

Having seen, and fallen in love with, Marjorie, I would have abandoned my vengeance (for all desire for it had died in me) but for their foul plot against her.

But no! Fate has her way; and there is a Providence that shapes our ends.

In the very act of relenting towards them, in the roseate glowing hour wherein my petrified heart was softening to forgiveness of them for what they had done to Rosemary, for filthy gold—what did I find? That they were again about to destroy her.

For this plot was again an attack upon my Rosemary . . . Rosemary-Marjorie . . . Marjorie-Rosemary . . . my daughter, my love . . . my child, my heart's desire.

If, for her preservation, these dogs must die,

they should die like dogs—and I would be their slayer.

But in no spirit of vengeance for the past, for wrongs done to me.

§ 4

And so, ere long, my rôle completely changed from that of avenging angel—or devil—to that of guardian angel—or devil—and I, who had come to kill, remained to save, though killing might well play a necessary part in saving.

And these were anxious days indeed, for I was in a quandary, and there is no anxiety to equal that which a lover feels on behalf of his beloved.

Although I was fairly sure that Marjorie's safety was secured, I could not be certain. I was troubled to the point of physical and mental breakdown. I must do something. I must get action. But action seemed impossible.

It may be imagined that I lost no time in taking all possible steps to secure Marjorie's safety. To the utter bewilderment of the scoundrels in whose power she was, I promptly revealed the incredible fact that I knew all about the plot, even to the exact figure of the sum that was to be the price and reward of their villainy.

I made it very clear to Charters that any

injury to Marjorie would precede his arrest by the briefest space, and showed him that I knew enough of the past of himself and his accomplices to bring his present edifice of respectability crashing to the ground, and himself and them to the gallows.

Naturally I was under no illusion that anything but my life stood between Marjorie and death, but, thank God, I had already, for my own personal ends, so arranged matters that about the most dangerous thing for themselves that Charters and his gang could do would be to put me out of the way.

Should I disappear, there were, as they knew only too well, at least three people whose immediate business in life would be to find out what had become of me.

Sorely was I tempted, at times, to take the risk and go out of hiding—taking Marjorie with me—without waiting for the arrest, trial, and condemnation of Chink Dorson.

But I resisted the temptation, partly because the police were seeking high and low for a man answering to my appearance (on the evidence of the stationmaster and ticket-collector at Witherby End); partly because I had not known Marjorie long enough to ask her to trust herself to me, a comparative stranger; and partly because some weeks at least must elapse ere I could receive from Uncle what I considered a

sufficient sum of money for the purposes of safe and distant flight, as well as for the payment of Williams H. William and his wife, who had to leave The Monastery suddenly, for, one night, we three having a rendezvous in his wife's room, William informed me as I entered, that he had caught sight of the ugly face of James, peeping round the end of the corridor.

"He'll have seen you come in, too," said William, "and he'll wait for some time to catch you going out. So we'll postpone this conference and slide out of the window. When 'Jimmy' gets tired of waiting, he'll butt in here—and get the surprise of his life."

Whereupon he unwound his strong knotted cord from its place round his waist, beneath his dressing-gown, slipped its square steel hook over the inner window-ledge, and led the way to the turf, twenty feet below.

Mrs. William then dropped the cord down to us, and we re-entered the house by way of the window of William's ground-floor room.

Sure enough, James flung open the door and entered half-an-hour later, and got, as William had said, the surprise of his life.

Albeit desperately anxious, I decided that, so long as I was alive, Marjorie was safe.

But I nevertheless took every possible precaution, and exercised the most unceasing vigilance. Among the former were, on the one hand,

efforts to sow mutual distrust among the members of the gang; to mystify, puzzle, and frighten them; and, on the other hand, to find faithful friends and a safe refuge for Marjorie.

This last I contrived to do, after making one of those ridiculous, if excusable, mistakes, the memory of which makes one blush with shame.

Having jumped—too quickly—to the conclusion that the chief Nursing Sister was none other than 'Frisco Fanny and the wife of Charters, I soon discovered that she was one of the noblest and finest of women, and that her brother, who was Vicar of Herepath, a neighbouring village, was in every way her twin.

At my wits' end, in an agony of fear for Marjorie that obsessed me by night and by day, I paid a visit to this man, quickly summed him up for what he was, and then, having revealed myself to him, I told him my whole story, laid before him the naked truth, and then asked,

"Do you believe me, and will you help?"

His reply was.

"I do believe you, and I will help."

"Then," said I, "Will you tell your sister everything that I have told you—everything, without reservation—and will you tell her that you are absolutely convinced that every word of it is true?"

"I will . . . But why not do that yourself?" he said.

"Because," I replied, "she would listen with angelic patience, pat my hand with kindly sympathy, and make a mental note to see that I had a good bromide sleeping-draught that night . . ."

"You see," I added, "I have been at some pains to acquire a reputation as a harmless lunatic—a reputation now firmly established and well-deserved."

Laurence Weldon smiled.

"Of course!" he said, "You're the 'madman' of whom my sister has told me diverting stories. D'you know, I absolutely forgot all about that, as soon as you started telling me your history."

"You're in no doubt now," I smiled in return.

"None whatever. Nor will my sister be—when I've finished talking to her. . . . At least, I hope not. . . . It will be a most frightful shock to her when she realises the truth about Charters. She has the greatest respect for him, both as a doctor and a man. Her work in that Nursing-Home is her life. . . . By the way, I suppose Dr. Studley is all right?"

"Absolutely. He's as much in the dark as to the past history of Charters, MacAdoo and Mr. James, as your sister is. Studley is one of the best, and with a blameless record."

"I'm sure of it, but how do you know?"

"Oh, I have a splendid chap who has been working here—under the name of Campball—for a very long time, and who has looked up his record pretty carefully. There's nobody there who isn't exactly what he or she seems to be, except Charters and his son, their two wives and MacAdoo . . . When you've told Sister Weldon, and convinced her that I'm no more insane than you are, I'll have a long talk with her myself, tell her all I've told you, and convince her of my sanity. When the time is ripe, I shall get Marjorie Lauderdell out of The Monastery and, as you have suggested, bring her straight here."

"It won't be easy to get her away," mused Weldon.

"No," I agreed, "it won't. But I have a certain acquired skill in evasions, and I'll get her away all-right when opportunity offers—provided your sister will help me, which, of course, she will. At present, and otherwise, it would be about as easy to get her out of the Tower of London . . ."

"But hang it all, man," he exploded, "why not go straight to the police at once? We can . . ."

Sadly I shook my head in contradiction.

"We can't," I smiled. "As far as Marjorie's case is concerned, there is not one shadow of proof,

or shred of evidence . . . and that Nursing-Home is a place of unblemished reputation, known to, and approved by, some of the most eminent doctors in England . . . And as for myself—going to the police would be an easier matter than coming away from them . . . Remember, I am a hunted criminal, an escaped life-sentence man, with a price upon his head."

"It's a cleft stick," said Weldon, thoughtfully, as he tapped the ashes from his eternal pipe.

"It's a cinch," said I, "but get your sister on my side, make her grasp the fact that what I have told you is the truth, and I'll save Marjorie, with her help and yours—and deal with Charters, James, MacAdoo and Co. afterwards."

"Yes," agreed Weldon. "Admirably conducted as The Monastery is, and with a splendid staff that includes Dr. Studley and my sister, it can't be allowed to go on . . . under its present régime, anyhow. If this case of Marjorie Lauderdell's is the first that has occurred there, there's no guarantee that it will be the last—even though these gentlemen have retired from business, as you say, and hope and intend to live in the odour of sanctity and the garden of virtue for the rest of their lives, as the brilliant doctors that they are."

A great weight was lifted from my mind

now that I knew that I had found for Marjorie a safe refuge and the staunchest of friends.

Sister Weldon's position was difficult and rather terrible, for, if my tale were true, her world was crumbling about her. Her attitude increased, if possible, my admiration of her, for she decided to suspend judgment, to wait and to watch, and then to act with the utmost promptitude in the event of a crisis, and the confirmation of the truth of my story.

Should Charters, MacAdoo, James, the Matron and Nurse Jones prove to be what I accused them of being, nothing on earth should prevent her immediate denunciation of them, nor induce her to work for another day in The Monastery under their direction.

Meanwhile, neither believing nor—in deference to her brother's admired judgment—wholly rejecting my story, she decided to watch and to wait; to increase, if that were possible, her vigilance, and to view any strange, peculiar, or curious happenings, events and incidents, if not with suspicion, at any rate in the light of what I had told her.

CHAPTER IX

AGAIN to shorten my lengthening story, suffice it to say that the arch-enemy, the one whom I had hated ten times more than I had hated Charters himself, the one who had sinned most against Rosemary, was now the one who sinned most against Marjorie, and, in so doing, met his death.

The man of them all whom I would most readily have killed, whom I would have killed with torture, but whom, softened by my love for Marjorie, I had now almost forgiven and would have spared, brought about his own dreadful punishment and death in trying to kill Marjorie.

Charters, his father, broken-hearted and fearing exposure and arrest, fled, taking with him his partners in crime, his wife, his daughter-in-law, and the man Machado.

What became of them I neither know nor care.

Of the four criminals who kidnapped Rosemary, three have died dreadful deaths in consequence, and I am now content to leave the punishment of the fourth, their leader, in the hands of God.

§ 2

Nevertheless, in the very act of leaving The Monastery in urgent haste and for ever, Marjorie and Sister Weldon being safely outside its walls, I spared a few minutes for an act of justice, of punishment to the arch-rogue of this gang, and, I believe, of benefit to mankind.

Dashing into his vacant bedroom, I took his keys from beneath his pillow, and rushed to his consulting-room.

Swiftly I unlocked a little door in the upper part of his big desk, the part that, consisting of pigeonholes and cupboards, rose up at the back of the leather-covered table-part at which he wrote.

From a locked drawer in this cupboard, I took another bunch of keys, among which was a small instrument shaped something like the blade of a screw-driver.

With one of these keys, I opened yet another little cupboard, and, feeling about on the floor of this, I discovered a neat round hole. Inserting the screw-driver blade, I soon found the head of a large screw, and with a dozen turns, withdrew it.

Having done this, I seized one end of the upper part of the desk in both hands, and with a heave and a push, swung it round on its hidden central axis, so that it stood across the desk at right angles to its usual position.

This exposed, at each end of the desk, an

area that was covered by the back of the desk when in normal position.

In each of these horizontal areas was a key-hole. With one of the keys of the second bunch, I unlocked and raised a flap that covered a recess, cavity, trough or box, of which it was the lid.

In this cavity were a number of small bottles containing various powders and liquids and labelled " Poison." From one containing a red powder, I withdrew the glass stopper, tipped out the contents, and exposed a small key.

With this I unlocked and raised the lid of the cavity on the right-hand side of the desk. This cavity also contained bottles, boxes, and tins. One of the latter, apparently a quarter-pound tobacco-tin that had never been opened, I removed and pocketed.

It contained my diamond, The Unsetting Sun.

My knowledge of its hiding-place was due partly to the skill, cleverness, courage, and persistence of Williams H. William, and partly to my own nightly prowlings, peregrinations and night-long sojourns, generally fruitless, behind the heavy curtain that had served me so well on the first day of my visit to The Monastery Nursing-Home.

§ 3

I had recovered my diamond, now more to me a symbol of success than a thing of intrinsic

value. My diamond—that had cost me Rosemary's life—and yet had saved Marjorie's.

I had triumphed over my enemies and had seen the worst and vilest of them die at my feet like a poisoned dog.

I had found Love—and with it Faith, Hope and Charity—for I had found Marjorie.

And in the same hour I lost her, or rather, learned that I had found her too late.

Perhaps suffering does—as poets and moralists have sung and said—act upon the human mind as does the furnace-fire upon the earthly ore.

Perhaps pain and sorrow and suffering are good, and it is true that we emerge from them, if emerge we do, stronger and braver and better.

I don't know.

But I do know that I was able to meet this fresh blow as a man should, and to stand up to it, and, while standing up to it, conceal its terrible effects.

§ 4

Or, again, of course, it may be that I had received so shattering a blow when Rosemary met her dreadful fate, had suffered so much then, afterwards, and in prison, that my mind and soul were numbed, and had lost some, at any rate, of their capacity for suffering.

Anyhow—Marjorie was engaged to be married—a fact the possibility of which had positively never entered my mind.

I had had so much else of which to think, we had had so much else of which to talk, that I had almost visualised her as having lived all her life in The Monastery, and as having no outside contacts and relationships save with her weak worthless uncle and his infamous wife.

Marjorie was engaged to be married.

Her fiancé was in India.

She would shortly be of age, and she wished to go out to him.

So be it.

I would take her and see her safe into his care.

For three weeks I should be in her company —continually in her company—from morning till night.

In that time I would find out something about her lover, and, at the end of it, I would meet him, measure him, and sum him up.

If Marjorie loved him, doubtless he was worthy.

But did she love him—or was it a boy and girl affair, a case, in the modern style, of "We're good companions, we know the worst of each other. What about a spot of matrimony?"

Well . . . I should have that three weeks. Three weeks of Paradise ineffable, and, if it must be, "Paradise enow."

§ 5

How shall I tell of that voyage?

I cannot if I would. Like Dante, I have been in Heaven, but I am no Dante to tell of it.

It lasted for a moment. It lasted for years —twenty-one wonderful days, each of which was a year—each filled with wonderful and innumerable happenings of indescribable and unimaginable loveliness, joy and glory; a smile upon Marjorie's lovely lips; a happy laugh, the sweetest music in this world; a pressure of loving hands upon my arm as we walked the moon-lit deck . . . For they were loving hands. Marjorie loved me, I'm sure, and, but for her cousin, might have fallen in love with me, I verily believe.

But who was I, grey, grim and battered—although scarce forty years of age—a hunted convict with a price upon his head? Who was I that I should make love to Marjorie Lauderdell?

One of the few things to which, in reviewing my life, I can look back with satisfaction, is the fact that loving, worshipping, adoring her as I did, I was able to refrain from making love to her. But I love to know that Marjorie loved me, and I love to think that, in happier circumstances, she might perchance have fallen in love with me, and loved me indeed as I loved her.

There is much of love in this last sentence. Well, it is better than hate, and so, thanking Marjorie and God, let me end upon that note.

AN EPILOGUE TO BOOK II

EPILOGUE TO BOOK II

"From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever Gods may be
That no life lives forever,
That dead men rise up never,
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea."

JOHN WAYE laid down his pen, his story finished.

Having read through what he had, that night, added to the story upon which he had been engaged since leaving Bombay, he folded the manuscript, placed it in a linen envelope that he kept in his dispatch-case, and addressed it to Mrs. Lauderdell, c/o Captain Lauderdell, Bengal Lancers, Allahpur, India.

This done, he took it to the ship's post-box at the foot of the saloon-companion.

Glancing at the clock above the entrance to the dining-saloon, he noticed that the hands stood at three o'clock. He posted the package and returned to his cabin.

Pulling the steel cabin-trunk from beneath

his berth, he unlocked it, and after a very brief search, took from it two articles—a swimming-suit and a tobacco-tin.

Undressing, he folded his clothes neatly, laid them on the foot of the bed, and then put on the swimming-suit.

He then carefully brushed his hair, put on a long dark ulster and a pair of shoes, and, taking the tobacco-tin, again left his cabin.

Going down the long alley-way between the cabins, until he came to the after-companion leading to the promenade-deck, he climbed this, and, without encountering anyone, stepped out into the sweet fresh air of the lovely moon-lit night.

Making his way aft, he came to the extreme stern of the ship, in the narrow passage between the after deck-house and the rail.

Here he stood awhile and gazed along the ineffably glorious path "all patined with fine gold," that led across the face of the gently slumbering ocean, from the ship to the great full moon.

His eye followed it and he smiled happily, his face transfigured and illumined.

A line of a nursery-rhyme from earliest childhood came into his mind. What was it?

"... down a river of misty light, into a sea of dew" ..?

something like that.

Golden river of misty light ...

And some lines of that poem learnt in later days :—

" Though the many lights dwindle to one light,
There is help if the Heavens have one ;
Though the stars be discrowned of the sunlight
And the earth dispossessed of the Sun :
They have moonlight and sleep for repayment
When refreshed as a bride and set free ;
With stars and sea-winds in her raiment
Night sinks on the sea."

Taking the tobacco-tin from the pocket of his ulster, he tipped from it, into his right hand, a colossal diamond, from which the moonlight at once struck baleful gleams.

He removed his ulster and threw it and the tobacco-tin overboard.

He stood for a few moments with his hand on the rail, in deep but smiling thought.

" Well ! " he said, apostrophising the enormous jewel, " Here ends your mischief . . . And whatever wrong I have done, in all my life, might well be forgiven me, for what I do now . . ."

And, swinging back his arm, with a cricketer's throw, he flung The Unsetting Sun high into the air and far out into the midst of that golden pathway to the moon.

For the last time it flashed and sparkled to the eye of man, and then, with a splash, disappeared for ever.

John Waye laughed.

Stepping on to the broad, flat taffrail, he stood poised for a moment, and then :

" Good-bye Marjorie . . ."

" Coming, Rosemary . . ." he cried, and dived—into his golden river of misty light.

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